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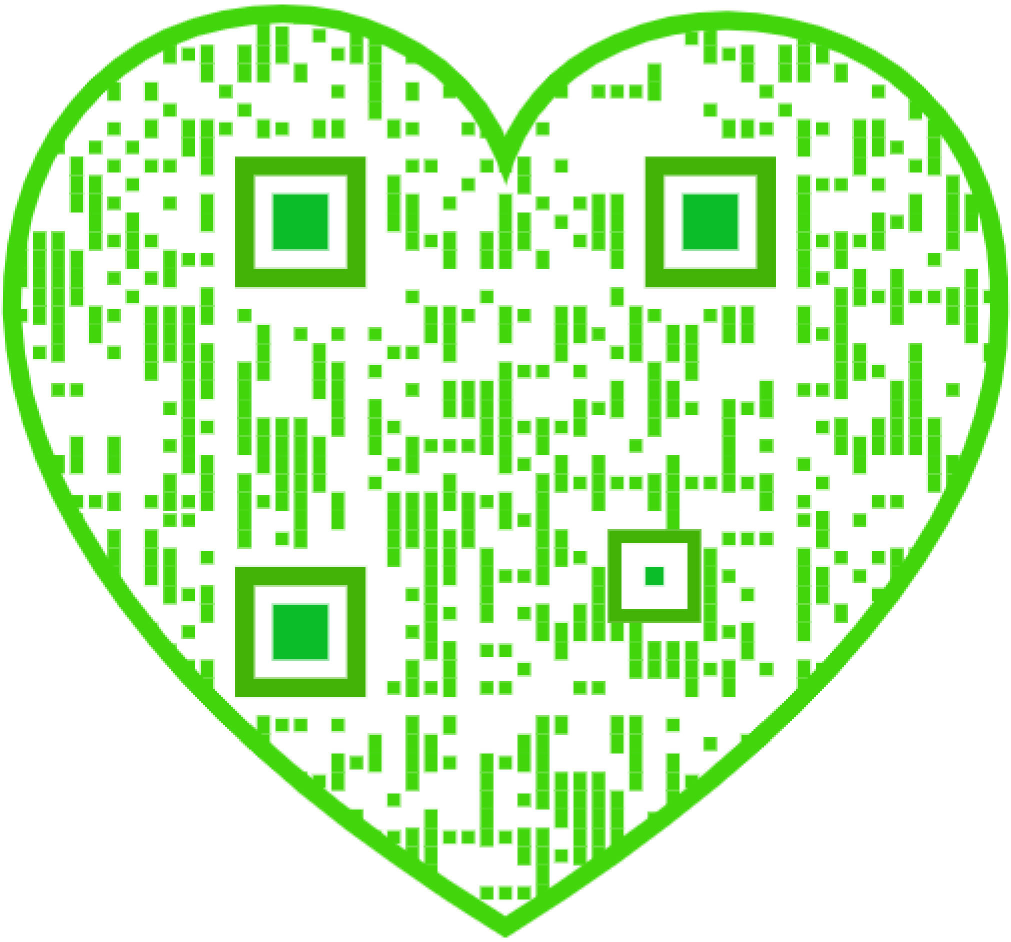
GRACIELAND

INSIDE GRACIE ABRAMS' WORLD — AND WHY GEN Z IS FLOCKING TO IT



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APRIL 19, 2025
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NO. 6

ON THE COVER
Gracie Abrams photographed by Heather Hazzan on March 20 at the Brooklyn Paramount.

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From left: King, Nora Fatehi and Anjula Acharia photographed by Harsh Jani on April 3 at Mukesh Mills in Mumbai, India.

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INTUIT DOME

FIRST COMEDIAN EVER TO HEADLINE THE ARENA.

UBS ARENA

HIGHEST ATTENDED EVENT IN UBS ARENA HISTORY.

SCOTIABANK ARENA

MOST TICKETS SOLD FOR A LIVE EVENT.

MOST TICKETS SOLD FOR A COMEDY RUN, HIGHEST-GROSSING COMEDY RUN IN THE VENUE'S HISTORY.

WELLS FARGO CENTER

HIGHEST ATTENDANCE AT A SINGLE COMEDY SHOW.

HERTZ ARENA

BROKE THE SINGLE-SHOW ATTENDANCE RECORD TWICE ON CONSECUTIVE NIGHTS.

HIGHEST TOTAL ATTENDANCE ACROSS MULTIPLE SHOWS.
RECORD GROSSES FOR BOTH A SINGLE SHOW AND A TWO-SHOW RUN.

PRUDENTIAL CENTER

HIGHEST ATTENDED COMEDY SHOW IN VENUE HISTORY.

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HIGHEST-GROSSING AND HIGHEST-SELLING COMEDIAN OF ALL TIME.

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CONGRATULATIONS

AC/DC

50TH ANNIVERSARY

Celebrating 50 years of one of the greatest rock bands
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John And Carlile Grace Top 10 With Collaborative Album

ELTON JOHN AND BRANDI Carlile's collaborative album, *Who Believes in Angels?*, debuts at No. 9 on the Billboard 200. The set — John's 22nd top 10 and Carlile's fourth — earned 40,000 equivalent album units in the United States in its opening week (April 4-10), according to Luminate. Its sales (36,500) were bolstered by its availability across seven vinyl and five CD variants, including signed versions.

John earned his first Billboard 200 top 10 more than 54 years ago with his self-titled album on the Jan. 30, 1971, chart. The last soloist to be alive while logging a longer top 10 span on the chart is Tony Bennett: He first accomplished the feat with *I Left My Heart in San Francisco* in October 1962, and 59 years later, the then-95-year-old debuted at No. 8 in October 2021 with *Love for Sale* with Lady Gaga.

John and Carlile ushered in the new album with a flurry of media appearances, including on *CBS News Sunday Morning*, NBC's *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* and *Saturday Night Live* and the CBS-Paramount+ special *An Evening With Elton John and Brandi Carlile*.

Meanwhile, the album's title track rises to No. 9 on Adult Contemporary — besting its previous No. 10 high first reached in March, when it extended John's record for the most top 10s (43) in the chart's history.

"Nobody wants another Elton John album like the other 35 [I've made]," John recently told *Billboard*. "This one had to have energy, and it had to have a statement saying, 'Listen, I'm nearly 78 and I'm going to be really sounding powerful.' " Said Carlile: "I don't think it'll ever really catch up to [me] how incredibly life-affirming this has been."

—KEITH CAULFIELD AND MELINDA NEWMAN

BILLBOARD 200

9

Who Believes in Angels?

Elton John & Brandi Carlile

LAST WEEK	PEAK POSITION	WEEKS ON CHART
-	9	1

PEGGY SIROTA

Hot 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	1	1	**#1 for 8 WEEKS** **Luther**	**Kendrick Lamar & SZA**	SOUNWAVE,J.M.ANTONOFF,ROSELILAH,M-TECH,SCOTT BRIDGEWAY,K.WASHINGTON (K.L.DUCKWORTH,S.I.ROWE,A.BOGGS,S.J.DEW,M.A.SPEARS,J.M.ANTONOFF,R.L.BACHA,M.BERNARD, K.WASHINGTON,R.M.AKERS JR,M.GAYE)	PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	1	20
⑦	③	②	**SAL** **STM** **Nokia**	**Drake**	ELKAN (A.GRAHAM)	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC/SANTA ANNA	2	8
2	2	3	**Die With A Smile**	**Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars**	BRUNO MARS,D'MILE,LADY GAGA,ANDREW WATT (BRUNO MARS,S.G.GERMANOTTA,D.EMILE II, J.E.FAUNTLEROY II,A.WOTMAN)	STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/ATLANTIC/ICLG	1	34
HOT SHOT DEBUT		④	**All The Way**	**BigXthaPlug Featuring Bailey Zimmerman**	BANDPLAY,CHARLEY COOKS (X.LANDUM,C.N.FORSBERG III,K.O'BRIEN GAINES,B.JOHNSON,K.K.JOHNSON, J.JOHNSON)	BIGXTHAPLUG/ATLANTIC/UNITEDMASTERS	4	1
⑤	⑤	⑤	**Pink Pony Club**	**Chappell Roan**	D.NIGRO (D.L.NIGRO,K.R.AMSTUTZ)	KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	5	43
3	4	6	**A Bar Song (Tipsy)**	**Shaboozey**	S.COOK,N.SASTRY (C.O.CHIBUEZE,S.C.COOK,N.SASTRY,J.JONES,J.A.KENT,M.A.WILLIAMS)	AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE/MAGNOLIA MUSIC	1	52
⑳	⑭	⑦	**Ordinary**	**Alex Warren**	A.YARON (A.WARREN,A.YARON,C.SHAPIRO,MAGS DUVAL)	ATLANTIC	7	9
6	6	8	**Lose Control**	**Teddy Swims**	INFAMOUS,AMMO,J.BUNETTA (J.E.COLEMAN,J.C.BUNETTA,M.RODRIGUEZ-DIAZ,MIKKY EKKO,J.C.DIMSDALE)	SWIMS INT./WARNER	1	86
⑪	⑨	⑨	**I'm The Problem**	**Morgan Wallen**	J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (M.C.WALLEN,G.W.BLOCK,J.MCLAUGHLIN,E.K.SMITH,CHARLIE HANDSOME)	MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	2	10
8	11	10	**Beautiful Things**	**Benson Boone**	E.BLAIR (B.BOONE,E.BLAIR,J.L.LARSEN)	NIGHT STREET/WARNER	2	63
12	10	11	**Birds Of A Feather**	**Billie Eilish**	FINNEAS (B.E.O'CONNELL,F.B.O'CONNELL)	DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	2	47
④	8	12	**Just In Case**	**Morgan Wallen**	J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (M.C.WALLEN,A.W.BAK,J.BYRON,J.K.HINDLIN,B.PENDERGRASS, J.P.THOMPSON,CHARLIE HANDSOME,E.K.SMITH)	MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	4	3
10	⑦	13	**APT.**	**ROSE & Bruno Mars**	BRUNO MARS,CIRKUT,O.FEDI,R.CHAHAYED (R.PARK,A.R.ALLEN,C.B.BROWN,R.CHAHAYED,O.FEDI, P.M.LAWRENCE II,BRUNO MARS,T.M.THOMAS,H.R.WALTER,M.D.CHAPMAN,N.CHINN)	THE BLACK LABEL/ATLANTIC	3	25
⑭	⑫	⑭	**AIR** **Anxiety**	**Doechii**	DOECHII (J.J.M.HICKMON,W.DE BACKER,L.F.BONFA)	TOP DAWG/CAPITOL/ICLG	10	5
⑬	⑬	15	**That's So True**	**Gracie Abrams**	G.ABRAMS,A.DESSNER,J.BUNETTA (G.ABRAMS,A.HOBERT)	INTERSCOPE/ICLG	6	25
9	15	16	**Not Like Us**	**Kendrick Lamar**	MUSTARD,S.MOMBERGER (K.L.DUCKWORTH)	PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	1	48
18	20	17	**Espresso**	**Sabrina Carpenter**	J.BUNETTA (S.A.CARPENTER,J.C.BUNETTA,A.R.ALLEN,S.N.JONES)	ISLAND/REPUBLIC	3	52
15	16	18	**TV Off**	**Kendrick Lamar Featuring Lefty Gunplay**	MUSTARD,S.MOMBERGER,SOUNWAVE,J.M.ANTONOFF,K.WASHINGTON,LARRY JAYY (K.L.DUCKWORTH, D.I.MCFARLANE,S.A.MOMBERGER,M.A.SPEARS,J.M.ANTONOFF,K.WASHINGTON,L.J.SANDERS,J.L.WEBB, J.BARRY,J.HAWKINS,C.A.J.MARTIN,C.WALLACE)	PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	2	20
⑯	17	19	**Love Somebody**	**Morgan Wallen**	J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (M.C.WALLEN,J.BYRON,A.G.GORLEY,J.K.HINDLIN,E.LOELV, CHARLIE HANDSOME,N.J.GALE,M.SORBARA,S.C.FRANK,S.F.R.MASTROIANNI,Y.GRUZMAN)	MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	1	25
19	19	20	**I Had Some Help**	**Post Malone Featuring Morgan Wallen**	L.BELL,CHARLIE HANDSOME,HOSKINS (A.R.POST,M.C.WALLEN,L.B.BELL,CHARLIE HANDSOME,E.K.SMITH, J.J.HOSKINS,C.P.WALTERS,A.G.GORLEY)	MERCURY/BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	1	48

Go to the Chart Beat section of billboard.com for complete charts coverage.

The 26-year-old Chicago native scores her first Billboard Hot 100 entry with the lead single from her 2024 album, *Bird's Eye*.

REMY BOURDEAU

HOT 100

79

"Love Me Not"

Ravyn Lenae

What was the inspiration behind "Love Me Not"?

When [co-writer/co-producer] Dahi played the beat, I was like, "This is something I haven't heard in a long time." It reminded me of when I heard "Hey Ya!" [by OutKast] for the first time. That mix of soulfulness with pop sensibility that anybody could sing and dance to and feels like it could have come out in any era — that's my favorite type of song. Lyrically, I like to play with the push-and-pull of knowing you love somebody even though you know it can't work. And I love when the lyrics feel a little sad but the music feels upbeat, or even the inverse.

What was your experience watching TikTok help the song become a hit?

Before it happened, I would have negative thoughts like, "Maybe that type of viral moment isn't in the cards for me." You're making TikToks and you feel like you're just putting stuff out into the void. This was an exercise of me stepping outside of my comfort zone in a good way. Seeing people discover me and this song, and then dive into my whole discography, has [shown that TikTok is] a beautiful tool.

The song's success has been a slow burn, not unlike your career. Do you ever wish things would click instantly, or are you content with the journey?

It feels like two sides of my brain. One that's like "Get on the train!" and the other part of me [understands] that timing is everything. I have to stay patient, diligent and focused, and things will start to turn over for me. We've seen it over and over again. I actually just saw Doechii a few days ago in San Antonio. It's been a while since I've been able to catch up with her. I was like, "When you won your Grammy, I started bawling." Whenever I see those glimpses of hard work paying off, it reassures me that I'm on the right path.

—KYLE DENIS

HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS

Artists who have recently made their initial appearances on the chart

ARTIST	SONG	DEBUT POSITION	DEBUT DATE
Sleep Token	"Emergence"	57	March 29
John Morgan	"Friends Like That" featuring Jason Aldean	92	April 5
Ravyn Lenae	"Love Me Not"	81	April 12
sombr	"Back to Friends"	90	April 12
Malcolm Todd	"Chest Pain (I Love)"	68	April 19

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD HOT 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

AC/DC

PWR/UP TOUR

WITH

THE PRETTY RECKLESS

APR 10	MINNEAPOLIS, MN	MAY 08	PITTSBURGH, PA
APR 14	ARLINGTON, TX	MAY 12	LANDOVER, MD
APR 18	LOS ANGELES, CA	MAY 16	TAMPA, FL
APR 22	VANCOUVER, BC	MAY 20	NASHVILLE, TN
APR 26	LAS VEGAS, NV	MAY 24	CHICAGO, IL
APR 30	DETROIT, MI	MAY 28	CLEVELAND, OH
MAY 04	FOXBOROUGH, MA		

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BILLBOARD 200

51

TRACY CHAPMAN

Tracy Chapman
Tracy Chapman

The 1988 former No. 1 returns, and to its highest rank since 1989, following its vinyl reissue on April 4. The album had been out of print on vinyl in the United States since at least the early 1990s.

69

FUCK U SKRILLEX YOU THINK UR ANDY WARHOL BUT UR NOT!!

Skrillex
Fuck U Skrillex You Think Ur Andy Warhol But Ur Not!! <3

Following its first full tracking week of chart activity (April 4-10), the set bounds 124-69 with 14,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States (up 27%), according to Luminate. It was surprise-released on April 1.

91

TRAVELLER
CHRIS STAPLETON

Chris Stapleton
Traveller

The chart-topping set becomes the first country album to spend at least 500 weeks on the Billboard 200. It led the list for two weeks in November 2015.

10

Ethel Cain
Preacher's Daughter

Ethel Cain scores her first entry on the Billboard 200 — or any *Billboard* album chart — with the No. 10 arrival of the singer-songwriter's 2022 release, *Preacher's Daughter*. The set jumps onto the list with 39,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending April 10, according to Luminate, with 37,000 of that sum driven by album sales (debuting at No. 1 on Top Album Sales). Powering those sales are vinyl purchases, as the project made its vinyl debut on April 4. It had previously only been available as a paid download or on streaming services. Vinyl sales account for nearly all of the set's 37,000 copies sold — the sixth-largest sales week for a vinyl album in 2025. —KEITH CAULFIELD

Billboard 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	2	1	#1 for 3 WEEKS **Playboi Carti** AWGE/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	MUSIC	1	4
87	①	2	**Ariana Grande** REPUBLIC	Eternal Sunshine	1	57
4	5	3	**PARTYNEXTDOOR & Drake** OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC/SANTA ANNA	$ome $exy $ongs 4 U	1	8
5	6	4	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	SOS	1	122
3	4	5	**Kendrick Lamar** PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	GNX	1	20
6	7	6	**Sabrina Carpenter** ISLAND/REPUBLIC	Short n' Sweet	1	33
⑩	10	7	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	One Thing At A Time	1	110
8	8	8	**Bad Bunny** RIMAS	Debi Tirar Mas Fotos	1	14
HOT SHOT DEBUT		⑨	**Elton John & Brandi Carlile** WAB/ROCKET/MERCURY/EMI/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	Who Believes In Angels?	9	1
NEW		⑩	**Ethel Cain** DAUGHTERS OF CAIN	Preacher's Daughter	10	1
9	11	11	**Tate McRae** RCA	So Close To What	1	7
7	9	12	**Lady Gaga** STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	MAYHEM	1	5
11	13	13	**Chappell Roan** KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	The Rise And Fall Of A Midwest Princess	2	55
13	14	14	**Billie Eilish** DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	Hit Me Hard And Soft	2	47
⑭	15	15	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	Dangerous: The Double Album	1	222
16	17	⑯	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	The Tortured Poets Department	1	51
-	③	17	**Lil Durk** ALAMO	Deep Thoughts	3	2
②	12	18	**Selena Gomez & benny blanco** FRIENDS KEEP SECRETS/SMG MUSIC/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	I Said I Love You First	2	3
17	20	19	**Noah Kahan** MERCURY/REPUBLIC	Stick Season	2	124
㊽	㉔	⑳	**Alex Warren** ATLANTIC/AG	You'll Be Alright, Kid (Chapter 1)	20	20

SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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ARTIST 100

16

ZEROBASEONE

WEEKS ON CHART

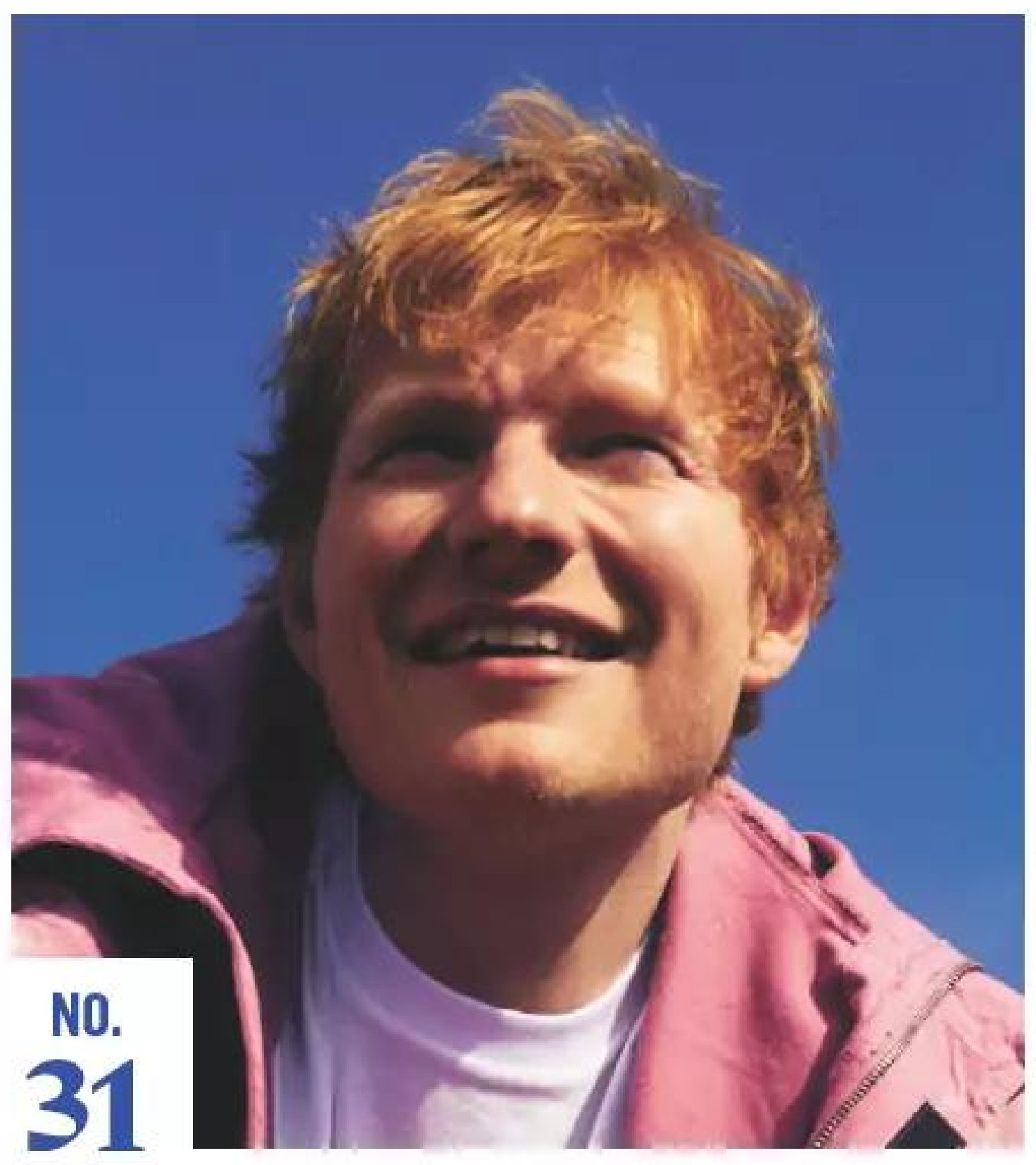
1

The South Korean boy band — which also arrives at No. 1 on Emerging Artists — makes its *Billboard* album chart debut with *Blue Paradise*. The six-song set enters at No. 1 on World Albums, No. 3 on Top Album Sales and No. 28 on the Billboard 200 (21,000 equivalent album units, according to Luminate). —KEITH CAULFIELD

NO. **29**

Warren's Extra-'Ordinary' Week

Alex Warren's "Ordinary" surges 14-7 on the Billboard Hot 100. The singer-songwriter's first top 10 totaled 20.4 million streams (up 9%), 8.3 million in radio reach (up 71%) and 6,000 sold (up 19%) in the tracking week. Notably, Warren and BigXthaPlug, the latter with his collaboration "All the Way" (see page 16), are the first artists to earn initial top 10s on the chart in 2025. Last year, 13 acts reached the tier for the first time: 4Batz, Gracie Abrams, Benson Boone, Sabrina Carpenter, Chappell Roan, Dody6, Noah Kahan, Rich the Kid, Sexyy Red, Tommy Richman, Rosé, Teddy Swims and Tyler, The Creator. —GARY TRUST



NO. **31**

Sheeran's 'Azizam' Zooms In

Ed Sheeran's "Azizam" enters at No. 28 on the Billboard Hot 100 thanks to 24 million in airplay audience, 8.5 million streams and 4,000 sold in its first week. The buoyant song takes its title from a Persian term that translates to "my dear" or "my beloved." Sheeran scores his third-best debut on Radio Songs (also at No. 28) this decade after "Eyes Closed" (No. 21, April 2023) and "Afterglow" (No. 22, January 2021). "Azizam" starts in the top 20 on Adult Top 40 Airplay (No. 14), Adult Contemporary (No. 16) and Mainstream Top 40 Airplay (No. 17). —G.T.

Artist 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
①	2	1	#1 for 16 WEEKS **Morgan Wallen**	BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	1	318
2	3	2	**Kendrick Lamar**	PGLANG/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	1	484
4	4	3	**Sabrina Carpenter**	ISLAND/REPUBLIC	1	71
NEW		4	**Ethel Cain**	DAUGHTERS OF CAIN	4	1
7	5	5	**SZA**	TOP DAWG/RCA	1	293
9	6	6	**Chappell Roan**	KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/REPUBLIC	1	52
12	10	7	**Drake**	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	561
52	①	8	**Ariana Grande**	REPUBLIC	1	488
11	8	9	**Billie Eilish**	DARKROOM/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	1	338
13	11	10	**Teddy Swims**	SWIMS INT./WARNER	3	83
8	7	11	**Lady Gaga**	STREAMLINE/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	1	314
10	13	12	**The Weeknd**	XO/REPUBLIC	1	509
14	14	13	**Taylor Swift**	REPUBLIC	1	559
16	15	14	**Bruno Mars**	ATLANTIC/AG	1	541
15	17	15	**Doechii**	TOP DAWG/CAPITOL	10	22
NEW		16	**ZEROBASEONE**	WAKEONE	16	1
RE-ENTRY		17	**Elton John**	ROCKET/MERCURY/EMI/INTERSCOPE/ICLG	7	164
57	46	18	**BigXthaPlug**	BIGXTHAPLUG/UNITEDMASTERS	18	48
RE-ENTRY		19	**Brandi Carlile**	LOW COUNTRY SOUND/ELEKTRA/3EE	9	8
23	21	20	**Jelly Roll**	BAILEE & BUDDY/STONEY CREEK/BMG/REPUBLIC	1	143

ZEROBASEONE: WAKEONE ENTERTAINMENT. WARREN: HUNTER MORENO. SHEERAN: PETROS STUDIO.

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD ARTIST 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ARTISTS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY ALBUM AND TRACK SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA FROM ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2025 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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NO. 1

‘All The Way’ To No. 1

“All the Way,” the genre-bending team-up between rapper BigXthaPlug (above, left) and singer-songwriter Bailey Zimmerman (above, right), debuts at No. 1 on Hot Country Songs. The former reigns in his first visit to the chart; the latter leads with his fifth top 10. Released April 4, the collaboration launches with 24.1 million official U.S. streams, 30,000 in radio airplay audience and 8,000 sold through April 10, according to Luminate.

The track concurrently opens atop Streaming Songs and Digital Song Sales, as well as at No. 3 on Hot Rap Songs. It soars in at No. 4 on the Billboard Hot 100, marking BigXthaPlug’s first top 10 and Zimmerman’s second.

The single, which is being promoted to mainstream top 40 radio, offers a snapshot of BigXthaPlug’s forthcoming country-focused collection. “It gives me a better feeling how they’ll feel about the project,” the Dallas native told *Billboard* about the first-week reception for “All the Way.” “I knew that song was going to do something.” —JIM ASKER

Hot Country Songs

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	Artist	WKS. ON CHART
HOT SHOT DEBUT	①	**#1 for 1 WEEK** **All The Way** BIGXTHAPLUG/UNITEDMASTERS	**BigXthaPlug Featuring Bailey Zimmerman**	1
1	2	**A Bar Song (Tipsy)** AMERICAN DOGWOOD/EMPIRE/MAGNOLIA MUSIC	**Shaboozey**	52
③	③	**I'm The Problem** MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	**Morgan Wallen**	10
2	④	**AIR** **Just In Case** MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	**Morgan Wallen**	3
4	5	**Love Somebody** MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	**Morgan Wallen**	25
5	6	**I Had Some Help** MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	**Post Malone Featuring Morgan Wallen**	49
⑧	⑦	**SAL** **I Never Lie** LEO33	**Zach Top**	34
7	8	**I'm A Little Crazy** MERCURY/REPUBLIC/BIG LOUD	**Morgan Wallen**	3
10	⑨	**Liar** BAILEE & BUDDY/BMG/REPUBLIC/STONEY CREEK	**Jelly Roll**	31
⑥	10	**The Giver** KRA/AMUSEMENT/ISLAND/MCA NASHVILLE	**Chappell Roan**	4

NO. 7

Pérez Remembered

Dominican singer-songwriter Rubby Pérez posthumously returns to the *Billboard* charts as his 2021 hits package, *Rubby Pérez ¡Grandes Éxitos!*, debuts at No. 7 on Tropical Albums with 2,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending April 10, according to Luminate. Pérez died April 8 at the age of 69 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, after the roof of the Jet Set nightclub collapsed during one of his performances, killing him and more than 200 others.

The collection’s debut is the merengue artist’s first album chart appearance in nearly four decades, after his self-titled debut reached No. 15 on Tropical Albums in 1987.

About 80% of the compilation’s units earned in the tracking week are from streaming activity, translating to 1.6 million official on-demand streams of the set’s songs, which were largely generated in the wake of his death. —PAMELA BUSTIOS

Tropical Albums

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	WKS. ON CHART
1	1	**#1 for 233 WEEKS** **Aventura** THE ORCHARD	**Todavia Me Amas: Lo Mejor de Aventura**	465
②	2	**Romeo Santos** SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Formula, Vol. 2**	525
17	③	**GG** **Romeo Santos** SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Formula, Vol. 1**	519
③	4	**Romeo Santos** SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Golden**	403
RE-ENTRY	⑤	**Prince Royce** TOP STOP/SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Prince Royce**	353
6	6	**Romeo Santos** SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Formula, Vol. 3**	137
NEW	⑦	**Rubby Perez** KAREN	**Rubby Perez ¡Grandes Exitos!**	1
8	8	**Romeo** SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Santos Utopia**	314
9	9	**Elvis Crespo** NORTE/SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Suavemente**	461
10	10	**Marc Anthony** SONY MUSIC LATIN	**3**	558

BIGXTHAPLUG: JOHN COTTER @RESPECTIVECOLLECTIVE. PÉREZ: CÉSAR SÁNCHEZ.

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

HOT COUNTRY SONGS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT COUNTRY SONGS, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY MEDIABASE AND PROVIDED BY LUMINATE AND SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. TROPICAL ALBUMS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR TROPICAL ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS.

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Shakira onstage in Rio de Janeiro in February.

SHAKIRA'S STADIUM SUCCESS

The Colombian superstar crowns the monthly Boxscore report for the first time

AFTER FOUR CONSECUTIVE MONTHS of acts adding to their career No. 1 totals (P!nk, Coldplay, Trans-Siberian Orchestra and Coldplay again), a new artist rules *Billboard*'s monthly Top Tours ranking. In her first appearance on the chart, Shakira leads the list with $32.9 million and 282,000 tickets sold in February, according to figures reported to Billboard Boxscore.

Shakira kicked off her *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran* world tour on Feb. 11 in front of 35,200 fans at Rio de Janeiro's Estadio Nilton Santos, resulting in a $2.9 million gross. Her pace then accelerated throughout the month. She reached $6.4 million in São Paulo on the 13th; $11.3 million in Atlántico, Colombia, on the 20th and 21st; and peaked at $12.3 million during back-to-back nights of shows at El Nemesio Camacho in Bogotá, Colombia, on the 26th and 27th. The two Colombia stops finish at No. 3 (Bogotá) and No. 6 (Atlántico) on Top Boxscores.

Shakira's 2025 tour almost exclusively showcases her in major-market stadiums — a first for the superstar after selling out arenas over the last 30 years. While her Latin American dates in the 21st century have averaged $1 million to $1.5 million per concert, her February shows paced $5.5 million and 47,000 tickets each night.

Following Bad Bunny, Los Bukis and RBD, Shakira is the fourth Latin artist to lead Top Tours and the first solo Latin woman to do so. —ERIC FRANKENBERG

Top Tours

	Artist	Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Shakira**	$32.9M	282K	6
2	**Tyler, The Creator**	$29M	188K	14
3	**Luke Combs**	$25.7M	186K	3
4	**Drake**	$19.8M	127K	8
5	**Eagles**	$19M	65.5K	4
6	**ATEEZ**	$17.9M	117K	8
7	**Ed Sheeran**	$15.3M	156K	10
8	**Chayanne**	$14.2M	122K	10
9	**Linkin Park**	$13.8M	103K	5
10	**Kelsea Ballerini**	$13.7M	121K	11

Top Boxscores

	Artist(s) VENUE DATE	Gross TICKET PRICES	Total Attendance NO. OF SHOWS	Promoter(s)
1	**Electric Daisy Carnival** AUTODROMO HERMANOS RODRIGUEZ, MEXICO CITY FEB. 21-23	**$20.9M** $68.17	**307K** 3	OCESA
2	**Luke Combs** MARVEL STADIUM, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA FEB. 7-8	**$16.6M** $376.27/$15.68	**116K** 2	Frontier Touring
3	**Shakira** ESTADIO EL NEMESIO CAMACHO, BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA FEB. 26-27	**$12.3M** $207/$97	**82.9K** 2	Live Nation, OCESA
4	**Tyler, The Creator** CRYPTO.COM ARENA, LOS ANGELES FEB. 14-15, 17-18, 20-21	**$12.1M** $229.50/$49.50	**77.7K** 6	AEG Presents
5	**Drake** QUDOS BANK ARENA, SYDNEY FEB. 16-17, 19-20	**$11.6M** $181.18/$84.08	**72.7K** 4	Live Nation
6	**Shakira** ESTADIO METROPOLITANO ROBERTO MELENDEZ, ATLÁNTICO, COLOMBIA FEB. 20-21	**$11.3M** $170/$61	**97.9K** 2	Live Nation, OCESA
7	**Eagles** SPHERE, LAS VEGAS FEB. 21-22	**$9.5M** $311/$120	**32.8K** 2	Live Nation
8	**Eagles** SPHERE, LAS VEGAS FEB. 14-15	**$9.4M** $311/$120	**32.7K** 2	Live Nation
9	**Luke Combs** SUNCORP STADIUM, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA FEB. 1	**$9.2M** $376.43/$15.69	**69.1K** 1	Frontier Touring
10	**Billy Joel & Sting** LUCAS OIL STADIUM, INDIANAPOLIS FEB. 8	**$8.2M** $349.50/$59.50	**46.6K** 1	Live Nation

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES

Top Venues

15,001 OR MORE CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Qudos Bank Arena** SYDNEY	$30.9M	188K	11
2	**Sphere** LAS VEGAS	$23.3M	96.4K	6
3	**Crypto.com Arena** LOS ANGELES	$12.8M	86K	7
4	**O2 Arena** LONDON	$9.5M	131K	11
5	**Amalie Arena** TAMPA, FLA.	$9.2M	73.1K	7
6	**Palacio de los Deportes** MEXICO CITY	$8.6M	103K	7
7	**Rod Laver Arena** MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA	$7.9M	59.9K	5
8	**Saitama Super Arena** SAITAMA, JAPAN	$6M	39.7K	2
9	**Barclays Center** BROOKLYN	$5.8M	46.7K	5
10	**Centennial Park** SYDNEY	$5.7M	43.1K	1

Linkin Park

Tyler, The Creator

10,001-15,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Brisbane Entertainment Centre** BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA	$17.2M	129K	13
2	**Dickies Arena** FORT WORTH, TEXAS	$10.1M	125K	13
3	**Olympic Sports Centre Gymnasium** HANGZHOU, CHINA	$7.8M	41K	4
4	**Moody Center** AUSTIN	$6.3M	56.1K	5
5	**RAC Arena** PERTH, AUSTRALIA	$6M	41.7K	3
6	**OVO Hydro** GLASGOW	$4.6M	77.4K	11
7	**Uber Arena** BERLIN	$4M	24.5K	2
8	**3Arena** DUBLIN	$3.8M	46.2K	4
9	**Van Andel Arena** GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.	$3.8M	54K	9
10	**CFG Bank Arena** BALTIMORE	$2.1M	24.7K	7

5,001-10,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Auditorio Nacional** MEXICO CITY	$12M	199K	22
2	**Mohegan Sun Arena** UNCASVILLE, CONN.	$6.7M	53.5K	9
3	**Resorts World Theatre** LAS VEGAS	$4.8M	26.4K	7
4	**Auditorio Telmex** GUADALAJARA, MEXICO	$3.5M	31.3K	4
5	**Bill Graham Civic Auditorium** SAN FRANCISCO	$3M	38.6K	5
6	**SSE Arena** BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND	$2.4M	27.3K	3
7	**Radio City Music Hall** NEW YORK	$2.3M	22.8K	4
8	**Texas Trust CU Theatre** DALLAS	$1.7M	22.7K	9
9	**Ford Field Park** VAIL, COLO.	$1.6M	11.2K	2
10	**Agganis Arena** BOSTON	$1.6M	5.3K	1

2,501-5,000 CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**David A. Straz Jr. Center for the Performing Arts, Morsani Hall** TAMPA, FLA.	$4.9M	51.3K	21
2	**Resorts World Theatre** LAS VEGAS	$4.8M	26.4K	7
3	**Fox Theatre** ATLANTA	$4.6M	69.3K	18
4	**Chicago Theatre** CHICAGO	$3.9M	40.5K	12
5	**Durham Performing Arts Center** DURHAM, N.C.	$3.3M	30.1K	12
6	**Boch Center - Wang Theatre** BOSTON	$2.2M	29.4K	9
7	**Beacon Theatre** NEW YORK	$2.2M	22K	9
8	**OLG Stage at Fallsview Casino Resort** NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO	$2M	35.8K	8
9	**Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre** BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA	$1.8M	27.1K	8
10	**The Mission Ballroom** DENVER	$1.4M	34.4K	12

2,500 OR LESS CAPACITY

	Venue LOCATION	Total Gross	Total Attendance	No. Of Shows
1	**Encore Theater at Wynn Las Vegas** LAS VEGAS	$3.4M	14.9K	12
2	**Ryman Auditorium** NASHVILLE	$1.9M	18.2K	9
3	**DeVos Performance Hall** GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.	$1.3M	19.5K	11
4	**Parker Playhouse** FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA.	$1.1M	19.7K	21
5	**Olympia Theatre** DUBLIN	$1.1M	30.3K	23
6	**The Eastern** ATLANTA	$724K	14.5K	9
7	**Carpenter Theatre at Dominion Energy Center** RICHMOND, VA.	$694K	11.2K	12
8	**Majestic Theatre** DALLAS	$600K	10.6K	8
9	**Enmore Theatre** SYDNEY	$583K	11.2K	6
10	**Mtelus** MONTREAL	$569K	19.4K	19

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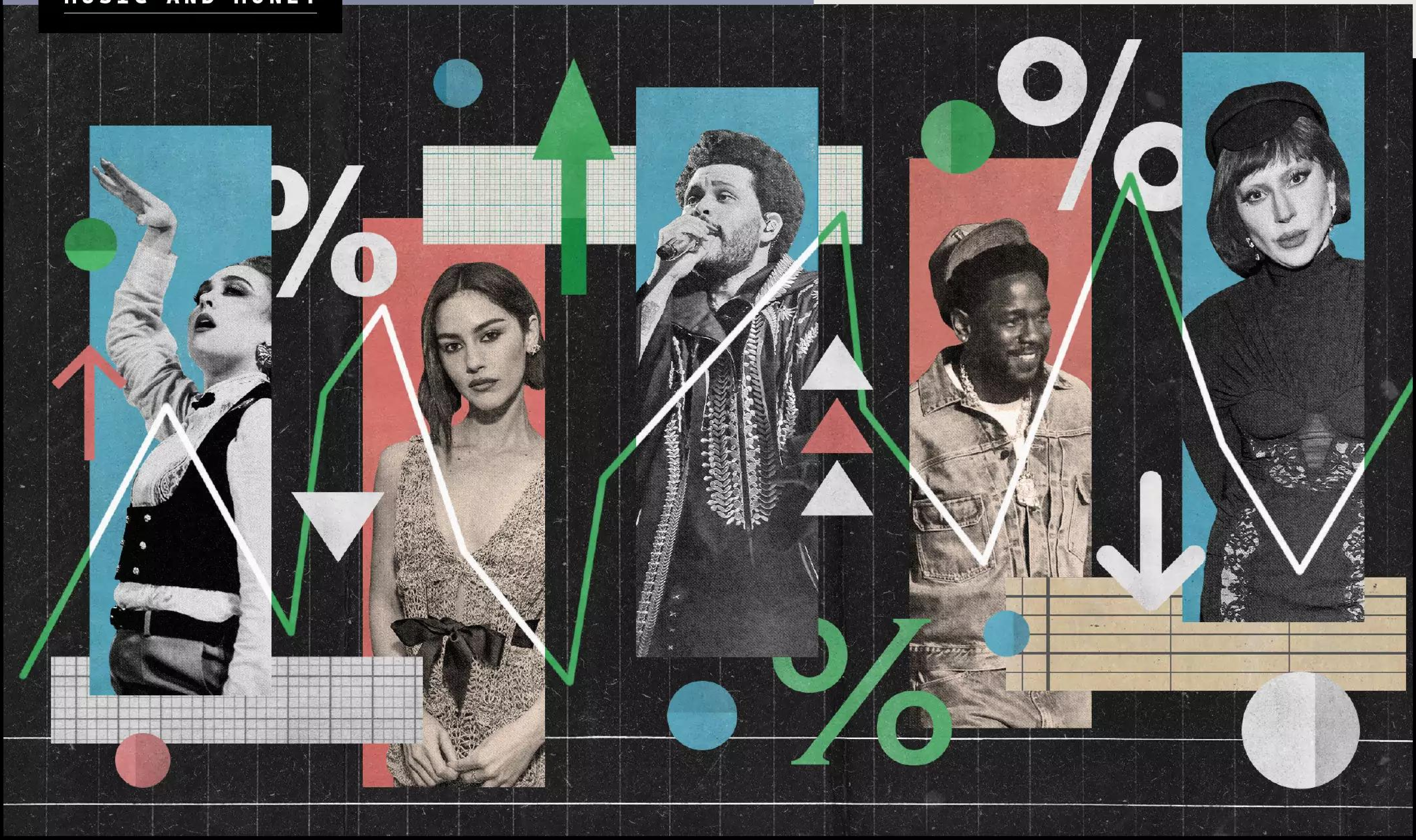
PG. 22 TRUMP TARIFFS' EFFECT ON MUSIC INVESTMENT
PG. 24 SPOTIFY'S EDITORIAL PLAYLIST TEAM UNVEILED
PG. 30 UNIVISION'S MEYER ON HIS MUSIC PRIORITIES

MUSIC AND MONEY



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Interscope Leads Labels In First-Quarter Market Share

Island quadruples its year-over-year number with assists from Lola Young and Gigi Perez; Drake and PartyNextDoor provide a big boost for Alamo

BY DAN RYS // ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREI COJOCARU

BIG HITS FROM Kendrick Lamar, Gracie Abrams, Billie Eilish and Lady Gaga propelled Interscope Geffen A&M to a 12.67% current share of the U.S. recorded-music market — music released within the last 18 months — up from 9.10% over the same period in 2024. That's just enough to edge out longtime leader REPUBLIC, which benefited from releases by The Weeknd and Morgan Wallen and continued success from Sabrina Carpenter and Chappell Roan to a 12.52% current share of the market through March 27, down slightly from the industry-leading 12.84% it held in first-quarter 2024.

Those two labels — IGA's share also includes Verve Label Group, while REPUBLIC's includes Island, Mercury, Big Loud and indie distributor Imperial — helped parent company Universal Music Group boost its year-over-year market share by nearly three percentage points to 36.82%, up from 33.90% in 2024. In doing so, UMG widened its lead over No. 2 label group Sony Music Group, which increased its first-quarter share from 26.91% in 2024 to 27.37% this year.

Primary Wave acquired a stake in **The Notorious B.I.G.'s** music publishing and recordings and certain name, image and likeness rights.

Country music label **Monument Records** folded after eight years, with some aspects of the label to be overseen by **Sony Music Nashville**.

The growth from those two companies largely came at the expense of the indie sector, which fell to a 19.92% current share by distribution ownership this year, down from 23.21% in 2024. (By label ownership, the indies are the biggest sector.) The third major-label group, Warner Music Group (WMG), largely remained static with a 15.89% current share, down slightly from 15.98% last year.

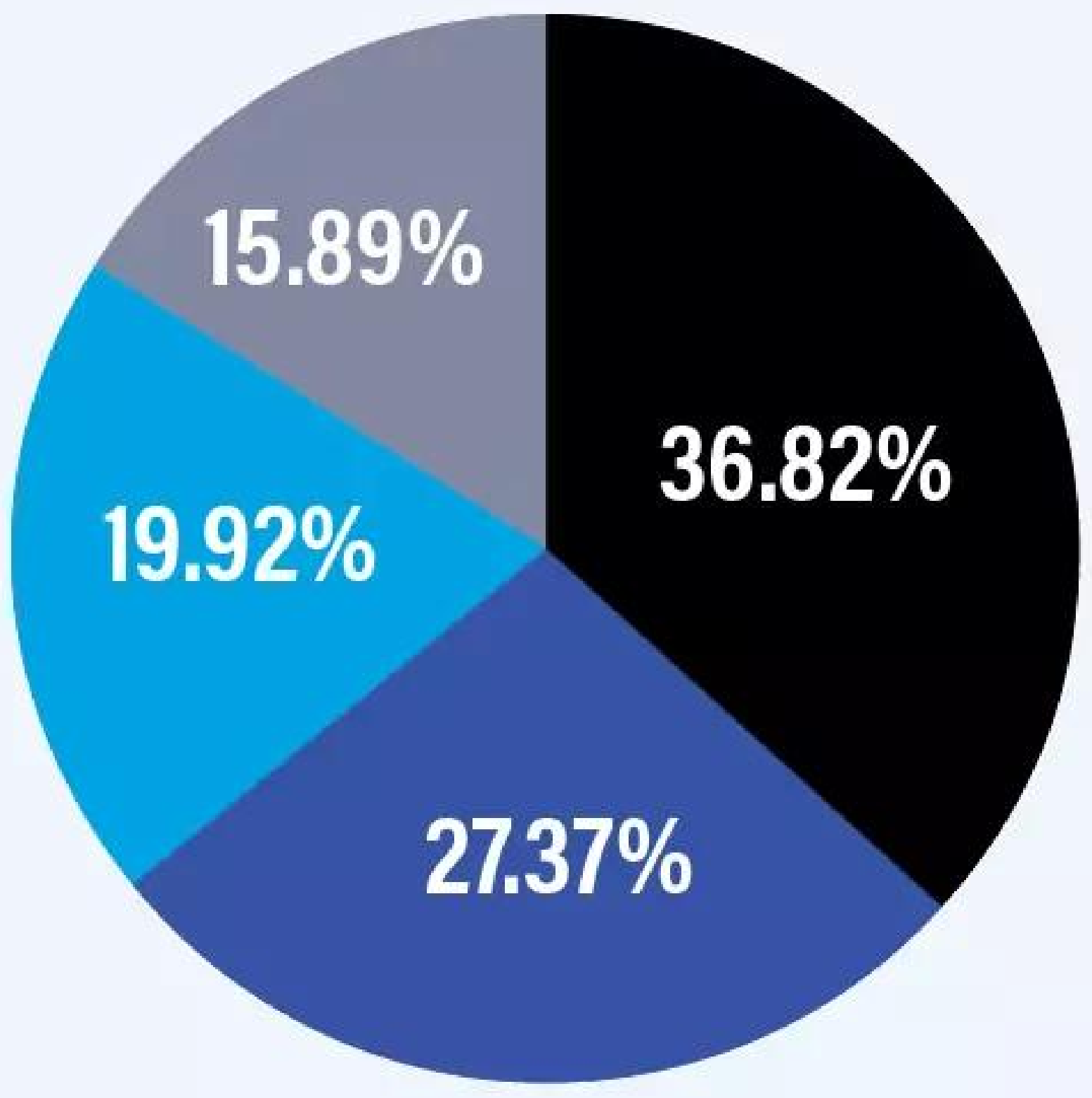
Most notable among labels under the REPUBLIC umbrella is Island's continued growth. After a year in which Carpenter and Roan broke out as superstars, singer-songwriters Lola Young ("Messy") and Gigi Perez ("Sailor Song") are helping the label maintain momentum. If Island's 2.94% current share for the quarter was broken out, it would rank eighth among its competition. It's also more than four times the 0.71% it posted in the first three months of 2024, when it would have ranked 20th.

A pair of WMG companies took the Nos. 3 and 4 spots: Warner Records (6.17%, which includes Warner Nashville, Warner Latin and Rhino) and Atlantic Records (5.58%, which includes 300 Elektra Entertainment and 10K Projects). Warner's market share is down from the 6.41% it had in first-quarter 2024, when it kicked off the year with breakout singles from Benson Boone and Teddy Swims. Atlantic's number is up from last year's 5.14%, as it shifts into a new era under the leadership of Elliot Grainge.

In fifth, sixth and seventh, respectively, are RCA (4.83%, down from 5.13% last year), Capitol (4.56%, down from 4.71%) and Columbia (4.25%, up from 3.71%). Capitol's market share includes Virgin Music, Motown/Quality Control, Capitol Christian Music Group, Astralwerks and Blue Note; Columbia's includes some labels from indie distributor RED.

In eighth place sits the other big story of the quarter: Alamo Records, which posted a 2.91% current share, up significantly from its 2024 mark of 1.53%, driven largely by the success of Drake and PartyNextDoor's *$ome $exy $ongs 4 U* album. Sony Latin (1.89%, down year over year from 2.38%) and Sony Nashville (1.83%, down from 2.08%) rounded out the top 10. ■

Current Market Share*



Universal Music Group
36.82%

Sony Music Group
27.37%

Indies
19.92%

Warner Music Group
15.89%

Rank	Label	Percentage
1	**Interscope Geffen A&M**	12.67%
2	**REPUBLIC**	12.52%
3	**Warner Records**	6.17%
4	**Atlantic Records**	5.58%
5	**RCA Records**	4.83%
6	**Capitol Music Group**	4.56%
7	**Columbia Records**	4.25%
8	**Alamo Records**	2.91%
9	**Sony Music Latin**	1.89%
10	**Sony Nashville**	1.83%

*Data from Dec. 27, 2024, through March 27, 2025, as calculated by Luminate.

Seeker Music acquired a "substantial share" of **Joan Jett's** publishing and recorded-music rights.

Island Records promoted **Marshall Nolan** to executive vp/head of commercial strategy.

MARKET TURMOIL COULD MAKE MUSIC INVESTMENTS GREAT AGAIN

Depending on how long the Trump administration spars with trading partners, music-backed debt markets and catalogs could see more investor dollars in coming months

PRESIDENT TRUMP'S flip-flopping on global tariffs has set global markets on a largely downhill roller coaster and held up many of the year's most-anticipated initial public offerings. Although markets rebounded strongly after the U.S. Treasury Department lowered most tariffs to a flat 10% — China is a notable exception — some anticipate this volatility could present an opportunity for music catalogs and debt as investors look for more stable ground.

Trump in Washington, D.C., on April 2.

Royalty investors, music valuation experts and entertainment bankers tell *Billboard* that investments in music intellectual property and buying asset-backed securities collateralized by music rights could see more demand from institutional investors looking to stockpile cash and safeguard against equities. For over a decade, music-catalog returns have held relatively steady even during economic downturns, which may appeal to investors seeking assets they can easily cash out in a pinch, those sources said.

"The royalties space has been relatively calm over the last week given the volatility seen elsewhere, with many investors expecting their portfolios to remain resilient as they have been through other macroeconomic and geopolitical events," says Stephen Otter, head of royalties at the Swiss-based private equity firm Partners Group, although, he adds, "It's still early days." An investor in HarbourView Equity Partners, Round Hill Music and Lyric Capital Group, Partners launched its own royalty investment strategy in 2024 to acquire music, health care, renewable energy and other royalties, with the aim of accumulating $30 billion in assets under management.

"As investors reassess their portfolio allocations in today's environment, we expect many may consider casting their net wider to incorporate other asset classes, such as royalties," Otter explains.

The rise of paid music streaming, which accounted for 51% of global recorded-music revenue in 2024, according to global trade association IFPI, has helped stabilize music royalties and make their returns more predictable. While rights holders have some exposure to recessionary changes such as advertising spending and consumer discretionary spending, "Music streaming tends to perform well and has historically offset other declines," says Brad Sharp, senior managing partner at Virtu Global Advisors.

In the 2024 Year in Review & Music Industry Outlook that Shot Tower Group issued earlier in April, the Baltimore-based boutique investment bank said that investor interest in music assets remains high despite industry reports of slowing streaming growth, although that outlook could change if macroeconomic uncertainty persists or a trade war were to take hold.

Brian Richards, managing partner at the music-focused investment bank Artisan, largely concurs, saying, "We haven't seen any evidence of pullback in the music market during this past week of turbulence."

Two sources say that, in the near term, they expect more activity in the credit markets for music. In the past 18 months, a growing number of music companies, like Concord, HarbourView and Recognition (formerly Hipgnosis) have raised money in the debt markets by selling asset-backed securities backed by the songs they own in their portfolios.

These sources anticipate more esoteric debt like this to become available to investors because corporate bonds have been rallying since the beginning of the year, driving a narrowing in the difference between the yields of Treasury bonds and corporate bonds. A narrow, or tight, spread between those bonds typically signals optimism.

Shot Tower said in its Music Industry Outlook that it expects at least one music company to issue an asset-backed security in April, which could provide a gauge of investor sentiment.

It also said, however, that if the chaotic market mood and global uncertainty persist, fewer music catalogs may come up for sale and financing may become selective.

At least one industry group expressed fears over the possibility of retaliatory tariffs on digital services companies, such as Apple Music, Amazon, Meta and YouTube, and maybe even issues collecting royalties.

"Since creative industries are among the few American industries that have a positive balance of trade with other nations, we will be watching closely to see if other countries target American music in any retaliation, which could include tariffs or other actions like withholding royalty payments," American Association of Independent Music president/CEO Richard Burgess wrote in an April 4 email to members.

Sharp says the withholding of royalties is unlikely or may be limited to countries such as China that have higher tensions with the United States. On April 9, the Treasury raised the tariff on goods from China to 125% following the country's imposition of retaliatory tariffs on U.S.-made goods.

"A rise in global economic tensions may result in an increase in consumption of more localized content on a by-country or by-region basis," Sharp says. Economic policy could also result in higher inflation, he adds, "which will potentially impact interest rates and have a knock-on effect on valuations." —ELIZABETH DILTS MARSHALL AND GLENN PEOPLES

Additional reporting by Ed Christman.

BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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ACTUAL INTELLIGENCE

The People Behind The Playlists: Meet Spotify's Human Curators

These nine tastemakers use their instincts and data to compile such flagship listening sessions as Today's Top Hits, All New Indie, Fuego and Lorem

BY KRISTIN ROBINSON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY YURI HASEGAWA

From left: Ronny Ho, Italiano, Cecelia Winter, Lizzy Szabo, Ong, John Stein and Alaysia Sierra photographed March 13 at Spotify in Los Angeles.

WHEN SPOTIFY'S SOCIAL media accounts started posting about the editorial team's song of the summer predictions in 2024, global head of editorial Sulinna Ong noticed a lot of commenters asking the same question: Is this artificial intelligence? "I actually went in and said, 'I can assure you we're not AI,' " she says, adding that she then found herself wondering, "Do people care whether it is [AI]?" The answer was a resounding yes. Ong recalls commenters were overjoyed to be able to identify her as a warm-blooded source of the faceless predictions. The reaction amounted to a collective "This is great. You're human!"

Having focused on high-tech improvements to playlisting over the last few years, such as the AI DJ that subscribers can utilize and improved personalized Daily Mixes, Daylist and other features, Ong says she realized listeners value human input and connection more than ever and decided to recalibrate the "equilibrium" between AI and Spotify's flesh-and-blood tastemakers.

"A big tenet of editorial is this idea of reflecting culture and also being able to propel culture forward," says J.J. Italiano, head of global music curation and discovery.

As a result, Spotify's editorial team is leaning further into its top playlists with new "Watchfeeds" — written and video content that contextualizes its choices. There's also more freestyling involved, such as the throwback songs that Spotify head of urban music, editorial Carl Chery slips into RapCaviar on Thursdays, or the newsletter that head of indie/alternative Lizzy Szabo writes for Lorem. Ong says interactive elements such as likes and comments may be added in the future.

To further individualize their work, Spotify's editorial team came together for a photo and spoke to *Billboard* about their backgrounds, their work and their favorite music. "We know that cultural knowledge is really important. AI and machine learning excel in passing large data sets and scaling, but when it comes to cultural understanding, that's where human editors really excel," Ong says. "But we are still focused on the strengths of both [tech and human features] and combining the two."

SULINNA ONG

GLOBAL HEAD OF EDITORIAL

Raised in the United Kingdom, Iran and Australia, Ong caught the music bug when she heard Kim Gordon singing Sonic Youth's "Kool Thing" as a 13-year-old. She worked in a wide array of roles for Live Nation, Sony BMG Music and French streaming service Deezer before joining Spotify in 2019. Prior to assuming her current position in 2021, Ong served as the streaming platform's U.K. head of music and U.K. head of artist and label services.

Favorite Spotify playlists?
Misfits 2.0, Liminal.

What are your 2025 goals for the editorial team?
We're thinking about how to make the playlists more engaging, and we think it's a combination of short-form video and editorial. We refer to our roles as editorial, but they also involve curation. Editorial is the storytelling, the context: "Why is this important? Why is it culturally relevant?" The curation is, "What song? What artist?" There's an art to combining both. As we look to the future, the editorial side is becoming even more critical. We are doubling down as human music editors in music discovery and trend forecasting in 2025.

Until now, Spotify's curators have largely worked anonymously. Why change that?
AI doesn't have a point of view. We found that people actually are interested about the people behind the playlists.

Alaysia Sierra

HEAD OF R&B, EDITORIAL

After cutting their teeth as a playlist curator for Apple Music, Sierra was recruited by former Apple Music colleague Carl Chery to spearhead R&B curation.

Favorite Spotify playlist?
Riffs and Runs.

What's the process of making a playlist?
A few years ago, I noticed there was a sound that emerged out of trap-soul, like Bryson Tiller, PartyNextDoor, Brent Faiyaz. Mostly, when people think of R&B they think of women, but this subgenre of R&B caters to men. I thought, "How do I create a space for them to lean into their R&B-loving?" So we created DND, or Do Not Disturb, to feature that laid-back, masculine feel. I wrote up my ideas, what artists would make sense in the space, what it would look like and presented it.

What changes have you brought to R&B playlists?
When I came in here, I felt like there could be a fresher perspective to R&B that can cater to the TikTok era. There's a romanticization of '90s and pre-'90s R&B, but there are all these kids coming up who love and are inspired by the genre. I wanted to evolve R&B at Spotify to showcase that the genre can be so many things today.

Any emerging trends you are particularly excited about?
I'm really excited about U.K. R&B right now. Streaming has globalized music, and I think it's given a lot of opportunity to that scene. We show that scene on Riffs and Runs.

JOHN STEIN

HEAD OF NORTH AMERICA, EDITORIAL

With almost 12 years at Spotify under his belt, Stein has been involved with playlisting from the beginning. He joined Spotify when the streaming platform acquired his previous employer, the now-defunct curation app Tunigo. Stein and his team became the curators of Spotify’s Browse page, and he worked his way up to his current position.

Favorite Spotify playlist?
Fresh Finds.

How has Spotify’s editorial playlisting evolved?
Back in those early days, we were very broad — much more moods- and moments-focused. There was a real emphasis on being an alternative to terrestrial radio. We wanted to introduce some new options: “Let’s think about activities and curate for those in addition to genres.” Over time, we created strong flagship genre playlists to be anchors, but we’ve also wanted to build out spaces that hit other moments in people’s lives — hopefully pushing forward the idea of blending genres.

What’s the balance of data and human curation in playlists today?
We’re coming to a point where the algorithmic side and the human side are coming together in a really balanced, beautiful way. As a company, we’re trying to embrace the fact that AI is really good at scale and serving you what we know you already like. But [identifying] moments of surprise and serendipity and cultural awareness is really difficult for it. You need a human editor to contextualize it in a way that brings emotion to it.

CARL CHERY

HEAD OF URBAN MUSIC, EDITORIAL

After working at hip-hop magazine *XXL*, Chery joined Beats Music in 2012, which was folded into Apple Music in 2014. He oversaw hip-hop and R&B at both streaming services before moving to Spotify in 2018, where he leads curation for its urban music playlists, including RapCaviar.

Favorite Spotify playlists?
Locked In, Gold School.

What trends are you spotting?
I’m interested in seeing what happens with sexy drill. Drill’s been around for a long time, and it keeps morphing. If you go back five years, that’s when it really broke through with Pop Smoke and Fivio [Foreign] and the Brooklyn drill scene. Part of the conversation around drill is that its subject matter is so hardcore it’s potentially [limiting the style]. But sexy drill has a lot of appeal. I’m keeping an eye on whether this is going to finally break through as the sound du jour in hip-hop.

What are some common misconceptions about Spotify editors?
Some people think playlisting is based on favors. They don’t pitch songs based on their merits or performance. They think building a relationship with editors enhances their chance of getting playlisted. That’s never been the case. [Others] think that playlisting is based on personal taste. Technically, it doesn’t matter if we like it. One of the most important qualities for editors is to be objective, [though] this doesn’t mean that personal taste doesn’t come into play. The sweet spot is when you get to support something that is at the intersection of your taste and what the audience likes.

Antonio Vasquez

HEAD OF U.S. LATIN, EDITORIAL

A 15-year music business vet, Vasquez began his career doing digital marketing for legacy musicians in Mexico City as social media and Facebook advertisements began to take off. Spotify then hired him as its first editor on the Mexico team. After a year, he moved to New York to start a U.S. Latin team. He’s now based in Miami.

Favorite Spotify playlists?
Fuego, Hanging Out and Relaxing.

How does the Latin editorial team work?
On the U.S. Latin team, we have a small but mighty team of three people. We have balanced our skill sets and music expertise to make sure we are covering the most Latin genres as possible. Antonella [Bocaranda] handles pop and tropical music. DC [Daniel Calderon] has his ear to the ground in Los Angeles with all things *música mexicana*. We always make sure that everyone has a bit of say in editorial decisions so we don’t fall [victim to] bias. Almost all priority markets in [Latin America] have their own editors locally. We work closely with them almost every day to exchange music and create a strategy.

What’s a Latin trend you’re tracking?
We’re starting to see stronger local scenes. So we need to be communicating even more across countries to make sure we are aware of what’s happening.

What’s a common misconception about Spotify editors?
That everything is data-driven. That really takes away from the heart and soul we put into our playlists every day.

CHERY: REBECCA SAPP. VASQUEZ: COURTESY OF SPOTIFY.

LIZZY SZABO

EDITORIAL LEAD, INDIE/ALTERNATIVE

Szabo got her start in music as an agent's assistant before becoming the executive assistant for former Spotify global head of creator services Troy Carter. She wrote an essay asking to move to the editorial team and detailing what she could do to expand the company's playlists. It worked: Szabo became an editorial coordinator and worked her way up to helm the service's indie and alternative coverage.

Favorite Spotify playlists?
All New Indie, Wine Bar.

How do you define the term "indie"?
More and more the question is, "What even is genre?" So we try to think in terms of audiences. With All New Indie, Lorem and those playlists, we are really fluid. Some weeks we question, "Is Caroline Polachek pop or indie?" You can make the case for either, but [we conclude] she would likely work best in indie.

With smaller artists, how do you balance human curation and metrics?
It is a challenge because it feels like there's a new breakthrough every week in indie. It's hard to predict. When we're looking at priority releases for the year, the truth is you might not know. Someone could come along in two months that's going to change the game. What's incredible about something like the Fresh Finds program is that it encourages us to go with our guts on the really tiny stuff and have somewhere to put it [for] an audience craving music discovery.

CECELIA WINTER

EDITORIAL LEAD, POP

Winter got her start in the music curation business with Spring, an app founded by elite runners that gave music fans song recommendations based on how fast they wanted to work out. After working as YouTube's pop editor, she joined Spotify's editorial team in 2023.

Favorite Spotify playlist?
Pop Sauce.

How do you define "pop" music?
Pop, by its traditional definition, wouldn't allow space for smaller artists, so we are really working to create spaces where artists who are making music that sounds pop — hook-driven and following a certain structure — can grow and find their audience. It's hard to define, but you know it when you hear it. Pop music is not as tied to commercial success as it once was either. There's top 40, which skews pop, but those metrics of success are not accessible to the vast majority of pop musicians. [With playlists] there is now an emerging mid-tier.

What is a market that tends to lead to pop trends that later emerge in the United States?
There's a lot of interesting music coming out of the Nordics, and there are a lot of interesting stories where American or British artists who have trouble [breaking through] in their home market really explode in the Nordics first. We saw that with Benson Boone. Our editor in the Nordics flagged him really early on.

J.J. Italiano

HEAD OF GLOBAL MUSIC CURATION AND DISCOVERY

Italiano entered the music industry as an artist manager, then shifted his focus when he took a job as head of streaming at talent agency YMU in 2016. He joined Spotify's editorial team the following year.

Favorite Spotify playlist?
Lorem.

How do you curate New Music Friday?
New Music Friday is a bit like the newspaper. We're trying to create opportunities for people to discover new stuff that we think they will like so, yes, there's going to be a handful of high-profile releases that you would expect. Then everyone from their respective genres comes together and brings the tracks they think are most relevant, as well as their favorite songs. Through a process of democracy and a little bit of chaos, we get it out the door.

How do you compile Spotify's biggest playlist, Today's Top Hits?
One of the core tenets is that it is not a chart. Yes, we want them to be 50 of the biggest songs that week, but we're also looking at user behavior. We look at all other playlists — how songs perform with different audiences. It's more of a science than an art, but it is still both.

Does anyone listen to songs submitted through the pitch tool?
We get pretty decent coverage by humans. There's over 100 people at Spotify whose job it is to listen to music. We use a combination of the tools we've built to sort through it and hiring the right people. Also, we pay attention to songs over time and can identify things that are trending upward or being saved a lot post-release.

RONNY HO

HEAD OF DANCE & ELECTRONIC, EDITORIAL

Though Ho booked concerts and hosted radio shows in college, she first worked in investment banking, and her initial job at Spotify was in business development. During her first years at the company, she got to know the members of the editorial team because she sat next to them. After moving to Spotify's music team as a business manager, a role opened up in editorial, and she was given a tryout despite her unorthodox résumé.

Favorite Spotify playlists?
Tech House Operator, Marrow.

Given the global popularity of dance, how do you coordinate with curators around the world to make the best playlists?
We have global curation groups. Dance was one of the first ones that started. It happened naturally with us just reaching out to curators in other markets to see what they're seeing. We talk now on a weekly basis about new music coming out, trends that are popping off, local subgenres or communities we find interesting.

How are you discovering music for your playlists?
It's a mix. We get inbound pitches from the Spotify for Artists pitch tool, but I am also going to shows all the time. A lot of DJs are rinsing tracks that aren't released yet live. I'll watch and see what the reaction is. If there's something that really hits with a fan base, I'll make note of it. Also, I look on the internet.

Pophouse Entertainment raised $1.3 billion to invest in catalog acquisitions and create entertainment experiences.

Billie Eilish and **FINNEAS** hired **Sandbox Entertainment's Jason Owen** as their new manager.

From The Desk Of...

IGNACIO MEYER

PRESIDENT, UNIVISION NETWORKS GROUP, TELEVISAUNIVISION

BY LEILA COBO

EARLIER THIS YEAR, Univision Networks Group president Ignacio Meyer's role was expanded to include oversight of the Hispanic media giant's portfolio of 35 owned-and-operated radio stations, nearly 300 affiliates, its Uforia streaming app, live-events business and networks group. The promotion empowered Meyer to fully execute his long-held vision for a streaming-era business strategy. In the wake of Univision's $4.8 billion 2022 merger with Televisa, his division would operate as part of a global, vertically integrated multimedia company where content created by different units can move freely between countries and platforms, including VIX, the company's growing streaming enterprise.

That content includes music, and Meyer says he's focused on fortifying its strength as one of the "pillars"— in addition to drama and sports — of the Televisa-Univision brand.

For the company's consumers, "Calling music a passion point is an understatement," the dapper, Madrid-born executive says. As a result, "The entire company is behind it."

Meyer, who is known for booking music artists himself on Univision shows and sending personal thank-you notes afterward, is well-loved by the industry, and his office is decked out with signed gold records, awards and other memorabilia. His walls will inevitably become more crowded, given his plans to return Univision to the music business. In the early 2000s, Univision Music Group operated as a label, which was sold to Universal in 2008 (before Meyer joined the company). And in 2016, Univision's Fusion Media Group division signed a multiyear, multiplatform deal with former Calle 13 member Residente, which is no longer active.

Meyer spoke to *Billboard* about those plans, as well as his strategy for harnessing the power of music to Univision's advantage.

How has your job changed since your promotion?
The big difference is we've become a platform-agnostic, content- and audience-first company. We're fortunate enough that, over the years, our ownership has invested in all the platforms. We have TV stations, local and national networks, radio stations, top digital destinations — whether it's web- or social media-based — and now we have a dedicated [video] streaming platform, VIX. This year, for the first time, we deployed a global content investment strategy and looked at every content investment for profitability and distribution purposes, regardless of platform or country. That's new and different because we realize that the strategy of having the

EMMY AWARD WINNER
1000 RECORD COVERS
Showrunning

FELIPE CUEVAS

Japan's **Avex** named **S10 Entertainment** founder **Brandon Silverstein** CEO of U.S.-based **Avex Music Group**.

Arista Records president **David Massey** will retire at the end of June.

consumer at the forefront is not about pulling them to a particular platform. It's about making sure we are everywhere they are and that they can flow freely.

How does music play into that?
Music is a passion point for U.S. Hispanics. We feel strongly that Latin music is mainstream today, and we need to follow that mainstream consumer everywhere they are. So we've made structural changes to allow music to travel more seamlessly throughout our ecosystem.

If you look at the history of Univision, there are isolated pockets of success with music. What was missing is the connective tissue. We're eliminating the barriers between calling something a "radio product" or an "audio product" or a "national" product or a "local" product. It's intellectual property. It's music, it's a song, it's a brand, it's an artist.

Can you give me an example?
This year, we treated Premio Lo Nuestro [an annual awards ceremony that recognizes achievements in Latin music] as a platform-agnostic event. It was simulcast on streaming and we had events [tied to] fashion and social with some brands. We decided to light up YouTube and social media before we aired the show, so we did our version of off-air awards and the pretelecast on digital networks. And it was all supported by audio-first talent that represented different genres. For example, we featured talent from our [Mexican music-focused] radio show, *El Bueno, la Mala y el Feo*. Just as we lean into our [TV] consumer brands, we're going to lean into our radio show brands and elevate those shows. And we're cross-pollinating. TV host Alejandra Espinoza, for example, is now also part of our Los Angeles morning radio show.

Awards show viewership in general has declined.

How do you make yours profitable?
We found a way to make money because we studied the ecosystem. It's not just a TV show. We're communicating, we're editorializing, we're telling a story, and we're using music to do so — across all of our platforms. It creates more inventory for brands to get more deeply involved. Ratings define and validate the commercial side of ad sales, but it's not the only measure of success. Total impressions, total reach, influence — that is success.

How else are you expanding Univision's music presence?
We are looking at entering the music business again through strategic alliances. That is new. I don't have the format a hundred percent. I don't know if it's a record label, but by virtue of this vertical, content-first approach, I am going to be getting back in touch with the industry. We want to be a more regular part of the music ecosystem. It could be a strategic alliance with a particular artist, a distribution deal with an artist, a management company, a publishing company or the distribution and promotion of music. I will generate content with you. I will generate social currency. We will make money by participating in a revenue share or license fee of the actual revenue streams we generate.

Some companies are not as convinced about the viability of music as a revenue driver.
We are. We demonstrate it day in and day out with our properties, and we know we could do more with it. So that's where the investment comes in. Could we have done it as a company 10 years ago? I think the answer is no. Structurally, we probably weren't set up for it. The power of music is it travels with no borders. Now we have the platforms. You can consume via audio, video, streaming.

Does Univision have any music-driven shows in the pipeline?
There will be announcements made, likely at the upfronts [in May]. But our approach is holistic. For example, you're going to see a lot more radio shows like *El Flow* and *El Bueno, la Mala y el Feo* — which are also podcasts — on TV or on VIX. We are no longer taking a TV-centric approach to business. We will have music properties, but it's not going be a one-show-fixes-all. Scripted is still a huge vehicle for music, for example. And we have a publishing business with over 100,000 copyrights here that I'm also managing.

What really drives fans to tune in to music-adjacent programming?
Storytelling and pop culture. Music has become a synonym for lifestyle. And it has a lot to do with social media and the way artists interact with their fans. Permanence in any kind of show all year is the most important. Also, there is a lot more being done in scripted than we are getting credit for as a music industry. There are so many storylines, documentaries, entertainment shows that are in and around music. How do we get people to engage? The most successful reality shows on television today have more hours of digital content than they do of [regularly scheduled] linear content. Because there are multiple platforms, they are "always on." The Latin market is diverse, and we are more than a media company. We are a cultural representation of the Latins who live in the U.S. and of the way we live in the U.S. ■

> **"We're eliminating the barriers between calling something a 'radio product' or an 'audio product' or a 'national' product or a 'local' product. It's intellectual property. It's music, it's a song, it's a brand, it's an artist."**

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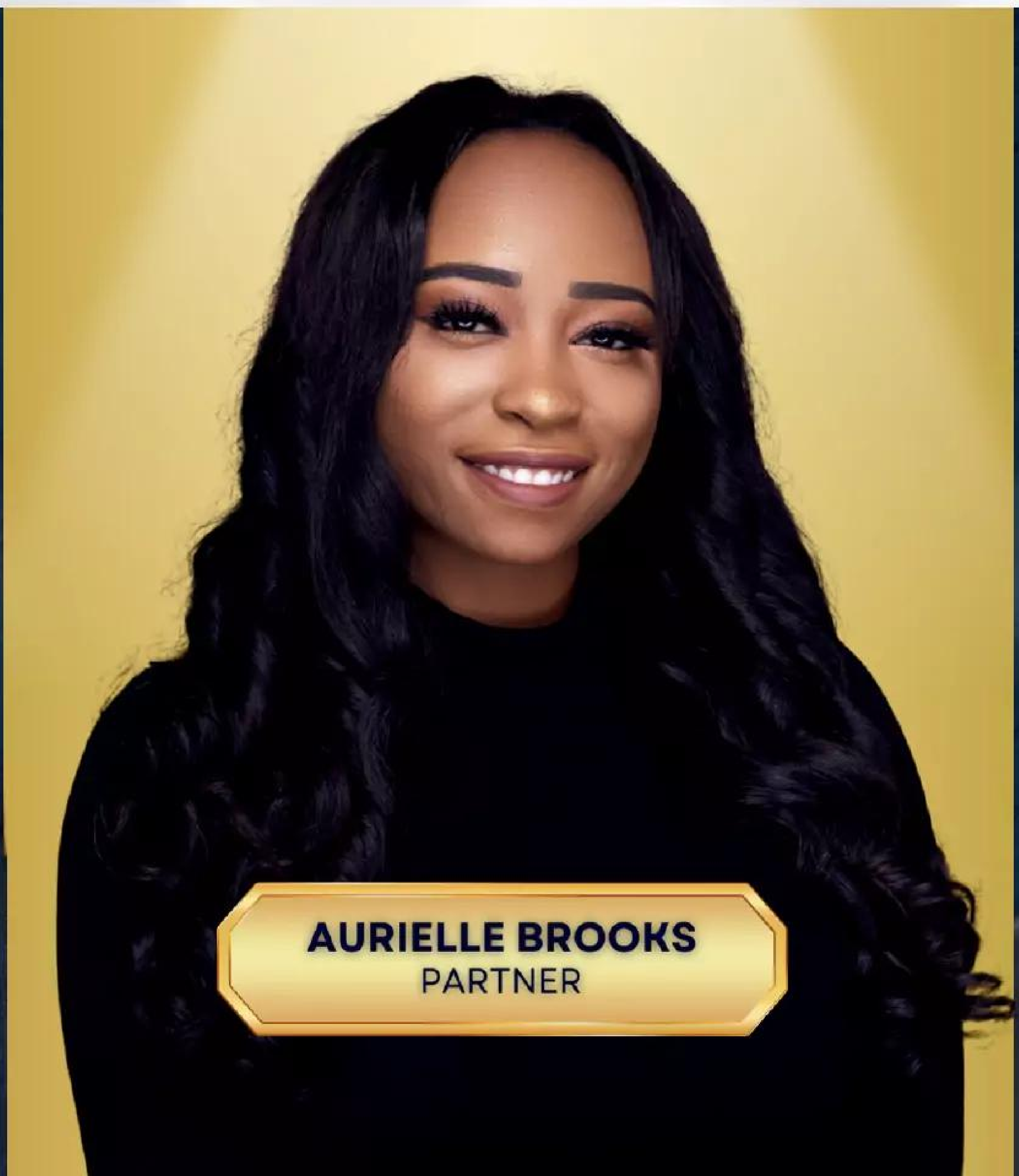

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In Bloom

After a dissolved creative partnership and multiple scrapped albums, Little Simz' *Lotus* is a raw reclamation of her story — and a potential U.S. breakthrough

BY KYLE DENIS

THIBAUT GREVET

I'M NOT TRYING to force my truth on anyone," Little Simz says firmly. "But I do need to talk about it, for me."

She's referring to the shocking dissolution of one of her dearest friendships, which has played out publicly throughout the year. Four months after filing a lawsuit against longtime studio collaborator Dean "Inflo" Cover for allegedly failing to repay a 1.7 million pound loan (roughly $2.2 million), Simz is ready to lift the veil on her side of the implosion. *Lotus*, out June 6, is her reclamation manifesto — a sonic rendering about ownership of her story, music and confidence.

In the two-and-a-half years since *No Thank You*, Simz' fifth studio album and follow-up to 2021's career-changing *Sometimes I Might Be Introvert* — which won the 2022 Mercury Prize and scored Simz her first top five entry on the Official U.K. Albums chart — she comfortably settled in among U.K. hip-hop heavyweights, performing at the BAFTA Awards and the Glastonbury festival.

Little Simz onstage at the Glastonbury festival in 2024.

Since launching her career in 2015, Simz had worked closely with Grammy Award-nominated producer Inflo and his wife, acclaimed R&B singer Cleo Sol, frequently joining the couple for collaborations under their Sault moniker. Simz and Inflo met at St. Mary's Youth Club as children, and the two went on to conquer the U.K. music industry in the years that followed, with Inflo producing three of her albums.

But in December 2023, according to legal filings, Simz allegedly fronted over $1 million to launch Sault's first and only live show, during which Inflo and Sol were joined by Simz and Grammy-nominated artist Michael Kiwanuka. But when the debt left her unable to pay her tax liability the next month, according to her filing, something broke inside the rapper.

"I got to a point where I lost my sense of purpose," she says, carefully choosing her words. "I'm quite an introspective person, especially when it comes to my music. But this time around, it felt harder. Making this album felt like a real breakthrough. I was led by God, my inner child and the Simz that was coming up and had this fire in her belly."

> **"I GOT TO A POINT WHERE I LOST MY SENSE OF PURPOSE ... MAKING THIS ALBUM FELT LIKE A REAL BREAKTHROUGH."**
>
> **—LITTLE SIMZ**

Lotus — which Simz introduced with the Miles Clinton James-helmed track "Flood" in February — peruses the full spectrum of her emotions throughout her journey to rebuild after one of her closest relationships ended. And on the rambunctious, bluesy album opener, which has yet to be released, she spits: "I'm lucky that I got out now, it's a shame I really feel sorry for your wife ... This person I've known my whole life, coming like a devil in disguise." The song is downright irate — her intonation has rarely been this ferocious — and Simz understood that it was a gamble. "I was really frustrated and hurt, and I wanted to scream," she says. "But it's tricky starting off on that foot sometimes."

To temper the album's unrelenting moments, Simz explores other relationship dynamics. On one conversational track that feels like a leaked private phone call, she weighs the impact of work and celebrity on family; on a more uptempo cut, she lists the ways her understanding of love has evolved. With more guest stars than any of her previous projects, none of whom she's ready to reveal, there are a lot of voices on the album, but Simz undoubtedly remains at the center.

Lotus, which she says sources its title from "one of the only flowers that thrive in muddy waters," prioritizes Simz' catharsis, but that's not the only reason it's such a hard-fought achievement. She tried to complete four other albums since the 2022 release of *No Thank You*, all to no avail.

"They were great, but it's more the situation of who I made them with," she says somewhat wistfully. "In letting go of that relationship, I had to let go of that music... It's like having a kid with someone; you might split with the person, but you don't just stop loving the kid."

Even if those albums are never released, Simz has plenty on the horizon. She will curate London's Meltdown Festival, taking place June 12-22, which will include her first orchestra-backed live performance. The 11-day undertaking will further cement Simz' U.K. superstardom, while her U.S. crossover is still taking hold. (Last year, she made her Billboard Hot 100 debut thanks to her feature on Coldplay's "We Pray," which hit No. 87.)

Could *Lotus* be the album to land that jump? Now that Simz has finally regained the confidence to narrate her own story, it very well could be. "I feel like it's growing slowly but surely," she says, "and I feel really honored to be a voice from the U.K. that people are taking to." b

JOSEPH OKPAKO/WIREIMAGE

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IN DEMAND

KIDDO A.I.

SONGWRITER

"My family lived in an *American Idol* household," says Amanda Ibanez, who goes by Kiddo A.I.; specifically, Adam Lambert was the contestant who inspired her to pursue music. "I would get in front of the TV and sing and my brothers would make fun of me." But her mother believed in her and encouraged her to get involved with a local church youth group, in which she would write songs and perform. The Miami native, now 28, began self-releasing her music as a teenager, but calls her career a "really slow climb." A decade in, after meeting hit-maker JKash (Charlie Puth, Morgan Wallen), she started connecting with Los Angeles-based songwriters — and even crossed paths with Max Martin at one point. Kiddo's "zero to 100" moment came three years ago, when she worked with Selena Gomez on Rema's "Calm Down" remix, which hit No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100. "I used to watch her as a kid on *Wizards of Waverly Place*, so it was very full circle," she says. That moment encouraged Kiddo to home in on songwriting for other artists instead of herself — "It's less invasive," she says with a laugh. Since then, she has worked on a number of pop hits, including several songs on Gomez and Benny Blanco's collaborative album, *I Said I Love You First*, Le Sserafim's "Crazy" and Tyla's "Back to You." —RANIA ANIFTOS

THE COLLABORATORS

"SUNSET BLVD"
Benny Blanco and Selena Gomez

"It really came out of nowhere. I think Benny or [songwriter] Michael Pollack was playing the keys, and we all just started singing this hook melody," Kiddo recalls of one of the standout songs on *I Said I Love You First*, which debuted at No. 1 on Top Album Sales. "I don't remember who said 'Sunset Blvd,' but it just made so much sense because then Benny and Selena were like, 'Wait, that's where we had our first date.' It was great to be able to help them say what they wanted to say. We wrote it in, I think, an hour. It basically wrote itself."

"LIKE JENNIE"
Jennie

"That was such a crazy day," Kiddo says of working on one of the fiercer tracks from Blackpink member Jennie's solo debut album, *Ruby*. "I went to Diplo's house and he lives deep in Malibu, so it was an hour drive. I was working with [him and] Tayla Parx for the first time, so I was very nervous because I was such a fan of both of them. When we got there, we went through a couple of different tracks, but nothing made sense. Then Tayla and I were like, 'We need something hard and just so in-your-face. This is Jennie's song, right? So let's make a song called "Like Jennie." ' Jennie freaked out. She loved it."

"CHILL"
Lisa

Kiddo worked on another Blackpink member's solo debut album as well: Lisa's *Alter Ego*. As she recalls, "I wrote [this one] with Ali Tamposi and John Byron. We actually came up with the hook before the session, and it just came so naturally." She says that while Tamposi devised the title, they worked together on a couple of hook ideas before Kiddo had to go out of town. "Ali worked with Lisa to finish it, and it came out great. It's one of my favorites on the album."

ONE TO WATCH

Brittany Broski

FROM Dallas

AGE 27

LABEL Atlantic Records

FOUNDATION Broski grew up as a self-described "old soul," singing in church and drawn to groups like The Mamas & The Papas and The Beatles. "I always [gravitated] toward bluesy rock'n'roll that has informed a lot of my favorite artists, like Hozier," Broski says. Yet she didn't tap into that inspiration during her career beginnings. In 2019, she achieved online stardom thanks to a clip in which she tried kombucha and her quizzical reaction became a viral meme. In 2023, she launched her digital talk show, *Royal Court* — featuring celebrity guests including Charli xcx and Maren Morris — and podcast *The Broski Report*.

DISCOVERY On the heels of her viral fame, but before establishing herself as an online personality, Broski received an email she thought was a joke. "My [current] A&R emailed in 2020 and said, 'I don't know who this is going to. I am such a big fan and I've seen [Brittany] post videos singing. If this is something that she'd like to give a chance, let me know,' " Broski recalls. She soon after took a call with Atlantic A&R executives Caterina Nasr, during which she described her artist sound and look: "It was this whimsical renaissance woman from the beginning," she says. "It was a lot of flowy fabric and corsets and candles — and it just made sense." This March, Broski released a reimagined cover of Harry Styles' "Adore You" and followed it with her debut single, "The Sun," a rousing, sultry track that she best describes as "ethereal, but at the core, a fucking stink-face bluesy rock song."

FUTURE While Broski fittingly wrote "The Sun" in Los Angeles, she co-wrote and recorded the majority of her music in Nashville, establishing a soulful sound that suits her voice. And while she confirms a "larger project" is coming, which will go "full throttle" into her personal life, she doesn't plan to leave her current nonmusic projects behind. "The worst I could do right now is say, 'Fuck all this stuff that I've developed, that my fans love, that I love. I'm a singer now,' " she says. "I want to do all of it — and do all of it well."
—LYNDSEY HAVENS

KIDDO: NESRIN DANAN. GOMEZ: EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES. JENNIE: STEPHANE CARDINALE/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES. LISA: LAUREN DECICCA/GETTY IMAGES. BROSKI: KIRT BARNETT.

CONGRATULATIONS

SHAWN TRELL

Here's to yet *another* year on Billboard's
list of **Top Music Lawyers.**

AEG
PRESENTS

STATE OF

Abrams photographed
March 20 at the
Brooklyn Paramount.

Styling by Spencer Singer
Renaissance Renaissance top,
Chanel earrings.

Gracie

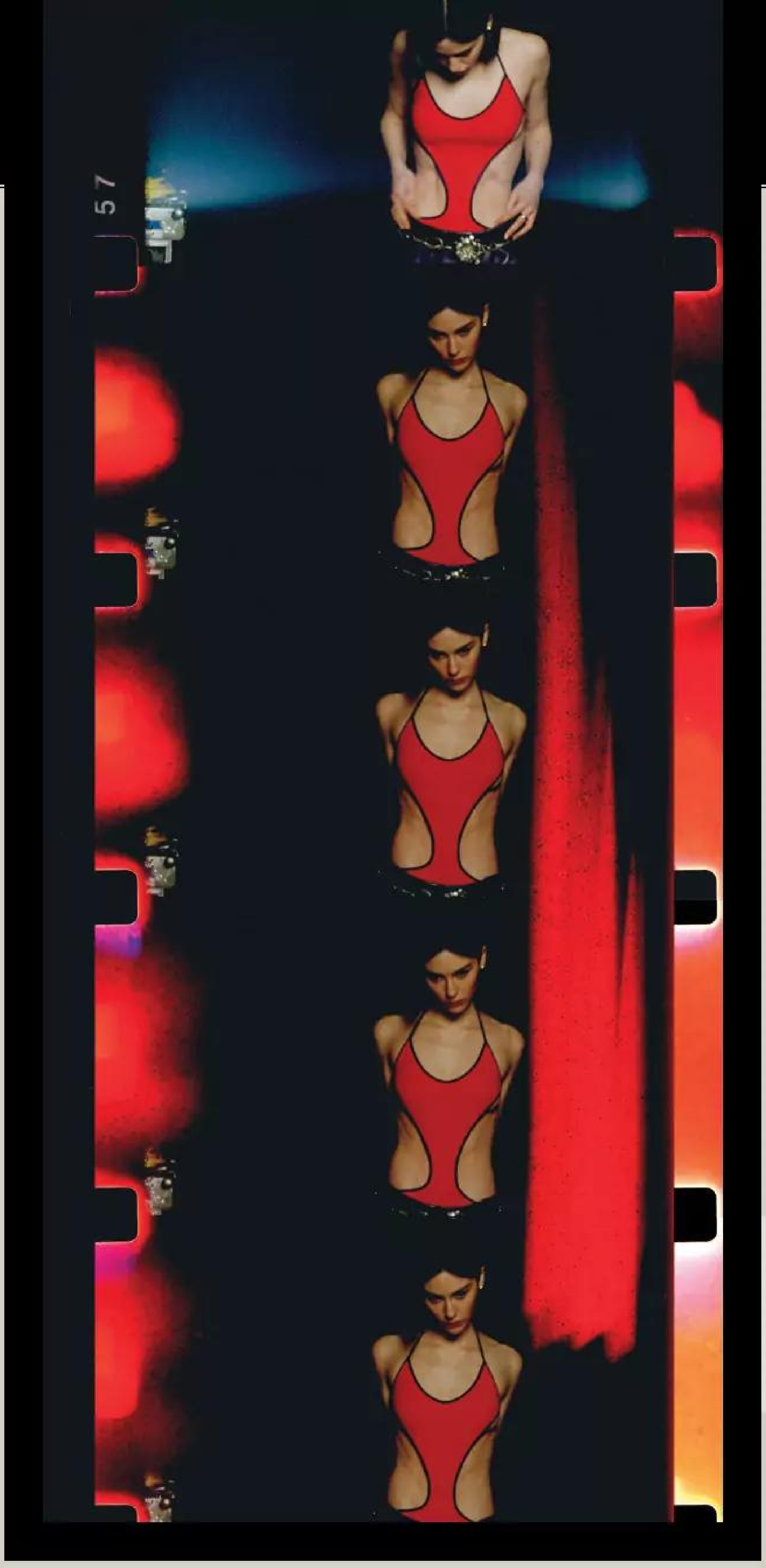
Amid her ongoing astronomical rise, singer-songwriter **GRACIE ABRAMS** is trying to stay true to what has gotten her this far: her honest way with words, and the fans who deeply relate to them

BY
HANNAH DAILEY

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
HEATHER HAZZAN

Judy Turner top and skirt, Chanel earrings and ring, Wolford tights, vintage Miu Miu shoes.

Opposite page: Miu Miu bodysuit, skirt, belt, socks and shoes.



AT THE BEGINNING of the year, Gracie Abrams found herself in a rare bind. For one of the first times in her life, she says, "I felt like I had nothing to say."

The 25-year-old musician had scheduled a week to spend at Long Pond Studio working on new music with her longtime collaborator, Aaron Dessner, when she realized that she was at a loss for inspiration — a frustrating position for Abrams, who isn't just one of Gen Z's most prolific songwriters, but has also been writing songs since she was a kid. "I was actually quite aggravated with myself that I had booked that time," she says now, months later. "I went into it being like, 'Oh, I'm going to waste Aaron's time.' I felt a little bit disconnected from myself."

It's understandable why Abrams might have felt at loose ends. After releasing her second album, the Dessner-produced *The Secret of Us*, last June, she went from the cusp of main-pop-girl status to bona fide stardom and has careened ever since on a career-affirming thrill ride that refuses to slow down. The witty, self-effacing album full of catchy acoustic anthems and searing appraisals of romantic disappointments debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200, and Abrams' momentum only snowballed that fall when its deluxe version produced her first top 10 Billboard Hot 100 hit, "That's So True," a snarky post-breakup kiss-off that became inescapable on TikTok. She has also been traveling basically nonstop for years, piggybacking a catalytic stint opening for Taylor Swift — her childhood hero — on The Eras Tour with her own sold-out fall run of U.S. theaters; she'll play North American arenas this summer, including two nights at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Add to that list a second Grammy nomination (best pop duo performance for "us.," her duet with Swift), her first turn as *Saturday Night Live* musical guest and the monthlong run of arena dates she wrapped in Europe just days before our conversation, and we're almost caught up with everything Abrams has accomplished over the past 10 months. On this March evening, she's poised and seemingly at ease with the nonstop nature of her life lately as we talk beside a vintage-looking piano tucked inside Ella's Lounge at the Brooklyn Paramount, where in a few hours, she and Dessner will play an acoustic charity show supporting World Central Kitchen at what is now, for her, an exceedingly rare small-venue stop. But she admits the pressure does occasionally get to her, as it did during that bout of writer's block over the new year.

" 'That's So True' was the first song I've had that did what it did," she explains, a cup of tea steeping nearby to help combat a sinus infection lingering from the tour. "Every time I sat down to try to write something, I felt a little sick. I was thinking, like, 'How do I do something that will beat it?' "

"There are more people [than ever] telling you what's going on charts-wise, radio-wise, streaming numbers, whatever," she says. "That can start to be internalized, and I actually really hate how that feels."

Since she signed to Interscope Records in 2019, Abrams and her team have strategically built up to this moment. Constantly releasing music and touring, her crowd sizes have ballooned as each project has performed better than the last; after a couple of EPs, she earned her first Billboard 200 entry in 2023 with debut album *Good Riddance*, also produced by Dessner, peaking at No. 52. Her rapid ascent since is comparable to those of fellow 2024 breakouts Sabrina Carpenter and Chappell Roan — though Abrams is hesitant to see herself as their peer. "When I think about both of their rises, it's like, *boom*," she says, her eyes widening. "I feel like I've almost slipped under the radar a little bit [in comparison]."

But to the extent that may be true, it's only because of how steadily she has grown over the past several years. "This is obviously her big breakout moment, but there was no skipping of steps or taking shortcuts," Interscope Capitol chairman/CEO John Janick tells *Billboard*. "She never wanted to rush anything — she really cared and wanted to make sure people heard her music in the right way and really connected with it. We're all just trying to figure out how to continue to make the train move."

Right now, that means simply trying to keep up with how fast things are happening. Backstage at the Paramount, where much of Abrams' team is gathered to support her tonight, Interscope Geffen A&M (IGA) vp of pop/rock marketing Hannah Gold explains that they meet "every Tuesday without fail" to discuss how they can best pounce on opportunities, like when the star's live Vevo performance of *Secret of Us* single "I Love You, I'm Sorry" started going viral in October. They immediately clocked the trend and released the recording on streaming services, which boosted the studio version of the track to a new Hot 100 peak of No. 19 shortly after. "It's kind of like the war room where we're like, 'OK, what are the things that we can do to help this spark that's happening organically?' " she says.

But while her label is tuned into all that's buzzing around her, Abrams' strategy for staying above water is entirely the opposite. She has learned to spend as little time as possible scrolling social media, where everything from her signature bob and chiseled abs to her rumored romance with actor Paul Mescal have become lightning rods for discourse, and incessant stan wars are fueled by people picking apart her music and pitting her against her peers. As Abrams sees it, as long as she doesn't look at the hate, "It doesn't exist.

"I can know that 10 people a day are having that conversation on Twitter — that's cool for them," she continues, shrugging. "I'm just going to mind my own business, really. I feel like any time I've slipped into paying too much attention to that, I'm less present in my life, I'm less available for people I know and love. It's not good for me as a person, it's not good for the art that I want to make. It's boring as hell."

Ignoring her own inner voices is harder. She eventually pushed through with Dessner at Long Pond and emerged with a handful of songs that are the foundation for her next project — likely a new album, she thinks, though she has considered dividing the material into EPs. But making sure she's not psyching herself out as her career takes flight is a continual challenge.

"I've just been trying to take the pressure off myself to have to reinvent," she says. "I hope that I don't get in my own way so much."

IT'S TWO HOURS until showtime, and there are *so. Many. Bows.* These accessories, part of the unofficial Gracie fan uniform, adorn the heads of both girls so young they have to hold a parent's hand as they cross Flatbush Avenue in Downtown Brooklyn and young women old enough to grab drinks at the bar before taking their seats at the venue.

Though smaller than usual, the gathering here offers a sample-size glance at the types of crowds Abrams has been drawing. Many of the fans are newbies who caught on to her after her recent career spike, like 7-year-old Ara, who discovered her on Spotify just months ago but is now Abrams-obsessed. To prove it, she and best friend Mazzy passionately perform the bridge of lead *Secret of Us* single "Risk" for me and reveal that, inspired by their new idol, they've started writing songs together.

But there are also O.G. fans like 18-year-old Ariana, who tells me she has adored Abrams since she first heard enduring fan-favorite deep cut "21" and saw her back in 2022 at the Bowery Ballroom. She says that watching her favorite musician's explosion over the past few months — after previously thinking of Abrams as "my little underground artist" — has felt "insane," her bow rippling as she shakes her head incredulously.

It's crazy to Abrams, too. Growing up in Los Angeles, she didn't have grandiose pop star ambitions. As a studious, introverted kid, she simply found songwriting therapeutic — "It was what made me feel like I could, like, bear everything," she says — and took inspiration from Swift and Joni Mitchell, whom she recalls listening to on car rides to school with her mother. The daughter of director J.J. Abrams and production executive Katie McGrath, she spent the first couple years of her career fielding questions about being a so-called "nepo baby"; now, she has arguably surpassed her dad's level of fame (well, at least in the eyes of Gen Z).

When Interscope first expressed interest in her as a teenager, it had nothing to do with Abrams' Hollywood pedigree. "She's done this on her own without taking any of the shortcuts," Janick says, remarking that he still hasn't even met the singer's parents. "It was purely signing her based on how she was as a person and a songwriter. That's what we were interested in."

The label was drawn in by Abrams' honest, evocative pen, which she started showcasing in high school by

HAIR BY BOBBY ELLIOT AT THE WALL GROUP. MAKEUP BY EMILY CHANG AT THE WALL GROUP. LOCATION COURTESY OF BROOKLYN PARAMOUNT.

using Instagram as an "impulsive diary" to upload song snippets and bond with the ever-growing base of followers who related to her lyrics. She says she was wary at first about involving a third party in her relationship with those fans — because "it did feel so personal from the jump" — but Interscope was willing from the beginning to make sure doing right by her listeners informed every decision. After spending a year studying international relations at Barnard College, she eventually felt comfortable signing with the label.

"I mean this in the greatest way possible: I don't think it feels like there's a major label running things," she tells me backstage before she is whisked away to get ready. "Everything — and I hope that the fans feel this way, too — feels as connected as it did six years ago."

That bond is on full display tonight as Abrams takes the stage in Brooklyn, where she stops to chat with audience members and reciprocate screamed "I love you's" between almost every song. Four separate times, she and Dessner are interrupted by a different fan shouting to say that it's their birthday today; each time, she gasps sincerely and offers felicitations.

"The way she respects her fans, herself and her craft are an inspiration to me," Noah Kahan, who tapped Abrams for his "Everywhere, Everything" remix in 2023, tells *Billboard*. "And a reminder that you can live a crazy and unfamiliar life and still remain true to who you are."

Abrams has strived to create these types of community spaces with her fans since the beginning of her career, even when they couldn't gather in person. When the pandemic forced her to cancel her first-ever tour in 2020, she concocted an idea for a series of virtual 100-capacity gigs — dubbed Minor Bedroom Shows — that were available by city to mimic the course she originally had scheduled, something her team thinks planted the seeds for her booming international demand today. "She was like, 'I want to route it like a tour,' " IGA's Gold recalls. " 'I want the fans in each market to start meeting each other so when they come to see me in real life, they know each other.' "

The Zoom shows also helped cultivate an audience that was desperate to see her in real life once she hit the road, something she finally did in September 2021, when she performed for the very first time before 300 people at the Constellation Room in Orange County. Then in 2022, Olivia Rodrigo, an early and vocal champion of Abrams, offered her the first of two crucial supporting gigs in Abrams' touring career. "She gave me such a shot, opening for her on the *SOUR* tour," she says of Rodrigo. "I adore her with my whole heart for forever and ever."

Rodrigo gushes right back. "Gracie has such a singular voice when it comes to songwriting," she tells *Billboard*. "I think it's rare to be so young and already have developed your very own lane. You can hear a song and instantly know if it's a Gracie Abrams song even if she wasn't singing it. That is so special and a real testament to her talent and influence."

Carole Kinzel and Shirin Nury, Abrams' agents at CAA, were already planning her 2023 *Good Riddance* tour when the friendship-beaded opportunity of a lifetime came knocking: an invitation to support Swift on the biggest stadium trek in history. They quickly rerouted some of Abrams' headlining dates to make it work — "Quite honestly, for an opportunity like that, we would have rearranged just about anything," Kinzel says — and she spent six months across 2023 and 2024 flourishing under her idol's wing. Studying Swift every night on the road, Abrams learned to command stadiums that would swallow most artists up while managing to also make them feel intimate. The lessons have come in handy on her *Secret of Us* tour, where she has made packed arenas feel cozy by performing on a B-stage decorated to look like her bedroom, a callback to her backdrop in those first virtual shows.

Tracking her progression, it's natural to wonder if Swift-size stadiums are in Abrams' future as a headliner. Her CAA team thinks they're in reach — but is that something she wants for herself? "Hell yeah," Abrams answers without hesitation.

But then she pauses. "I could have never imagined myself admitting to that," she continues, more slowly. "I think having had the privilege of opening for Taylor in the stadiums that we played, to now have a visual reference and a real sense of what it feels like to be on a stage in that environment… It's something that I miss and desperately hope to earn over time."

A WEEK AFTER the Paramount show, Abrams is still glowing. "It was a sweet little hang," she says brightly over the phone.

She's on the opposite coast now, back in her native Los Angeles and in a car on her way to rehearsal for Billboard's Women in Music, where she'll perform "I Love You, I'm Sorry" and accept the Songwriter of the Year honor — and, hopefully, catch up with Doechii, whose music Abrams says she's "quite addicted to" at the moment. (A video from the ceremony will later show the two chopping it up.) She also says she has been streaming Lady Gaga's *MAYHEM* nonstop: "When I think about songwriter greats, she has been top of mind recently."

Moments for her own songwriting seem to come fewer and farther between these days, but Abrams finds them whenever she can. Despite having only three weeks between the end of the *Secret of Us* tour's European leg and the Asia run's April 3 kickoff show in Singapore, she spent a precious free Saturday with Dessner at New York's Electric Lady Studios before heading to L.A. Abrams says they went in hoping to nail just one particular song, but emerged 12 hours later having worked on "a bunch" of tracks for the next project, which comes together in her head more and more with each scattered studio session.

"Aaron and I are catching each other in these little pockets between hectic times," she explains. "Every day that I live with the music, things start to become a little clearer. There's something we're starting to crack that is making both of us feel energized."

She also found time recently to reteam with one of her first collaborators. Abrams initially met Benny Blanco when she was dating his then-intern, Blake Slatkin (who produced much of her early work), and first worked with him over five years ago on *minor*'s title track, which was followed by her appearance on his 2021 song "Unlearn." For "Call Me When You Break Up," off Blanco's new collaborative album with fiancée Selena Gomez, he tapped Abrams to guest — and with a No. 46 Hot 100 peak, the track became her seventh career entry on the chart.

"What's so cool about her music is that she really tells it how it is, whether it makes her look great or not so great," Blanco raves on a call. He remembers how she was once "much more shy" in the studio and says he was "blown away" by how quickly and confidently Abrams stacked her own harmonies on "Call Me."

"She makes these songs that are huge in stadiums now, yet they also still feel like she's whispering them into your ear in your bedroom at three in the morning," he adds, excitedly pointing out that his car just passed a billboard in Manhattan with her face on it. "She's just a force to be reckoned with."

The billboard, it happens, was for Hourglass Cosmetics, which just announced Abrams as the face of its new campaign. She's also a Chanel ambassador; her CAA team carefully curated both deals to bring her more opportunities beyond music — though Kinzel and Nury note that they're "saying no to a lot" because of how full Abrams' plate already is. (Abrams also tells me that she has "loads of ambitions" outside of songwriting and touring, but those, for now, are "sacred." When I ask if she would like to act, she replies politely, "I don't know what I want to attempt to speak into existence at this point in time," though she does say she may someday like to compile her poetry and journal musings from years on the road into a book or something similar.)

One thing Abrams definitely saves room for, though, is celebrating the people who've helped get her to where she is. The day before our call, she attended She Is the Music's Women Sharing the Spotlight event highlighting the work of her mostly female team — much of which has been with her since the beginning — and accepted an award on the group's behalf. "It's definitely been intentional," Abrams says of professionally surrounding herself with "badass women." "I lean on these women. I admire the way that they work. I think all of us are equally invested, and I think that the fact that we get to learn

Marni dress

Chanel jacket and skirt, Wolford tights.

BOULDER
TRACK

from each other is a really beautiful thing."

"Gracie is an artist who lives and breathes what she stands for — and she wants women at the table, period," adds Abrams' longtime manager, Alex DePersia. "For me, being in this group of women who genuinely support each other is so, so powerful."

Abrams also feels lucky to have some of the women she has looked up to since she was a tween become mentors she can turn to if she ever needs advice. There's Lorde, who's a calming presence just to be around — "She's like 800 years old inside ... whenever we're together, I feel my nervous system regulate differently" — and of course, Swift. When things start to get overwhelming by way of public scrutiny, Abrams says simply being in the Eras superstar's orbit helps put things in perspective.

"It's like, I really don't have it that bad in terms of invasion of privacy, you know what I mean?" she says. "I feel like I learned a lot from her, obviously, but one of the things that I've felt lucky to observe is how extreme it can be [for her]. It helps right-size my own shit."

On that front, Abrams says she hasn't let prying eyes or snapping phone cameras change how she approaches her everyday life or dating. ("That would be so unfortunate," she says with a laugh.) And, much like Swift, she also continues to write about her relationships in vivid detail, regardless of how many listeners may or may not be dissecting the lyrics for clues about, say, a certain *Gladiator II* star.

Overall, she seems strikingly well-adjusted to the public pressures of her mounting fame. Maybe it's because of her upbringing, or the fact that she has been preparing for this moment so gradually for the past six years, but "That's So True" co-writer Audrey Hobert suggests that her childhood best friend is simply preternaturally suited for greatness.

"She's completely built for it," Hobert tells me over Zoom in the middle of unpacking her new L.A. apartment. (The pair previously lived together for two years in the city, writing much of *The Secret of Us* in their shared digs, but Abrams recently relocated to New York to be closer to work, telling me that "the walking of it all is really good for my brain.")

"I've never watched someone work harder for longer," Hobert says. "I don't think anyone should have to go through certain aspects of what this job brings if you're really good at it and you're successful, but I would say — you don't really hear that girl complain. You don't.

"Even to me, her safe person," she emphasizes. "She is genuinely grateful at her core. It's not just something she says."

For Abrams, it's a clear creative vision and sense of purpose that sustains her — even in flashes of self-doubt when, for a moment, she can't quite find the right words. That's why she says one of her main priorities now is finding ways to stay centered during all the chaos, whether by journaling constantly, daydreaming about "disappearing to the woods" to spend "days and days reading" as soon as her schedule relents or redefining what exactly "topping" herself means: writing a song, perhaps, that makes her feel even more passionate than composing "That's So True" drunk on the roof of Electric Lady with Hobert did, even if that song never beats it in terms of numbers. Take away all the noise and, from the beginning, it's always just been about her writing and whom she writes for — and she wants to make sure she's not missing out on either by moving a "million miles an hour."

"I think the best use of me as a human being on this planet, at least right now, is trying to use my writing or storytelling to make as many people as possible feel connected to themselves and to this community," she says.

With conviction coloring her voice, she adds: "That is what I think I'm here for right now." b

SOUND AND VISION

After 18 years, the world has finally caught up to **Anjula Acharia**'s cross-cultural dream — and with a new imprint at Warner Music Group, she has created a pipeline for bringing star South Asian artists stateside

BY JASON LIPSHUTZ

PHOTOGRAPHED BY HARSH JANI

ANJULA ACHARIA REMEMBERS WHEN the one person who had set her up for success told her she was going to fail. And Jay-Z was there, too.

In 2008, Acharia and Interscope Geffen A&M's then chairman, Jimmy Iovine, were sharing breakfast at a New York hotel. Iovine — who had partnered with Acharia's South Asian music/news hub, Desi Hits, to develop a Universal Music Group-backed imprint — remembered her previously telling him how much "Beware of the Boys," Jay-Z's 2003 remix of Panjabi MC's bhangra single, had meant to her as the kind of cross-continental exchange that she hoped Desi Hits would foster. So when Acharia stood up to leave the breakfast, Iovine asked her to stick around for a few more minutes... at which point Jay made his surprise entrance.

Acharia, who was in her 30s at the time, geeked out, gushing about her love of "Beware of the Boys" and asking the rap superstar about how the remix had come together. Then Iovine pulled the rug out from under her. "While I was sitting with him and Jay-Z, Jimmy told me that Desi Hits was going to fail," she recalls. "His words were, 'I know pop culture, I know a visionary, and this is just way too early. This would be right in 10 to 15 years.' "

A Punjabi kid and die-hard music fan born to South Asian immigrants, Acharia grew up in Buckinghamshire, England, devouring music that fused styles from around the world and dreaming of creating a platform that spoke to both Eastern and Western demographics. She was a senior partner at a London-based executive search firm who co-founded *Desi Hits Radio* as a popular early podcast in the mid-2000s; then Iovine backed Desi Hits in 2007 as a stateside label for South Asian artists after she moved to New York. The pair helped engineer a crossover hit in 2009 with "Jai Ho," A.R. Rahman's Academy Award-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* theme that was remade for U.S. listeners with The Pussycat Dolls added to it.

"She was so talented and passionate about the music," Iovine reflects today, "but sometimes things just don't come together." And by the early 2010s, Acharia admitted her mentor had been correct: The world wasn't ready. "We didn't have streaming platforms, social sharing or an ecosystem to support the industry," she explains. "It was just very segmented back then and really hard for things to travel." She wondered aloud why Iovine had invested in Desi Hits if he had doubted the idea. "And he says, 'Because you're an album, not a single.' "

On roughly the timeline Iovine predicted, the industry has changed drastically — and Acharia, who spent that intervening time outside of music, is returning to it with an entirely new album, so to speak. She and Warner Music Group exclusively tell *Billboard* that they have launched 5 Junction Records, a joint-venture label under WMG, as a pipeline for South Asian artists to reach North American listeners, much like a modern Desi Hits but with significantly more established talent and infrastructure. That talent includes its flagship pair of artists: Bollywood mainstay and pop triple-threat Nora Fatehi and ascendant Indian singer-rapper King. Both already have multiple hits and millions of streams overseas, giving them the ideal foundation to take the first crack at establishing North American footholds.

"It's always been in our mind to promote this music to the world," King says. "That has always been the fight, but now, I feel like we are at the right time and right spot. The next five years are looking bright."

Acharia believes that a cultural wave is about to crash down on the U.S. mainstream, similar to how Korean pop, Latin music and Afrobeats all made an impact on top 40 radio beginning in the late 2010s. Based on the South Asian market boom over the past decade — by the end of 2023, India had become the second-largest on-demand streaming market in the world, behind only the United States — and the English-language artists who have made overtures in the hemisphere through touring and studio team-ups, she's not alone in that prediction.

"The best way to think about it is, what are your next billion-user markets?" WMG CEO Robert Kyncl says.

From left: Fatehi, Acharia and King photographed April 3 at Mukesh Mills in Mumbai, India.

“Our hungers align. It’s hard to take a vision and sell it to someone else… But when [Anjula] opens her mouth and starts her pitch, you somehow have FOMO — you feel like you’re going to miss out if you’re not paying attention.”

–FATEHI

Styling by Meagan Concessio
David Koma dress, tights and shoes.

"It's always been in our mind to promote this music to the world. That has always been the fight, but now, I feel like we are at the right time and right spot. The next five years are looking bright."

–KING

Styling by Nikita Jaisinghani
Versace jacket and shirt, Brune & Bareskin shoes, Amrapali necklace.

FATEHI: HAIR AND MAKEUP BY MARIANNA MUKUCHYAN. KING: HAIR BY JAVED SHEIKH AND MAKEUP BY SWAPNIL HALDANKAR.

> “Music is a place that makes me feel like I’m home, and fusion music makes me feel like I’m being seen.”
>
> –ACHARIA

Styling by Kristina Askerova
Versace dress and jewelry,
Paris Texas shoes.

He notes that the South Asian industry has been top of mind for him for over a decade: As vp of content at Netflix in the early 2000s, Kyncl saw firsthand the scope of demand for Hindi shows, and as YouTube's chief business officer in the 2010s, he spent every year in the region, developing partnerships that he believes are paying off today. "You have to invest," he says. "If you don't, you'll wake up five, 10 years from now and realize you just missed this whole new growth era."

Kyncl has been friends with Acharia since his Netflix days (when he first discovered Desi Hits in the course of researching Hindi shows) and has followed her career closely. After leaving Desi Hits in 2014, Acharia stayed in the entertainment space by managing Priyanka Chopra Jonas, whom she originally signed as a Bollywood star trying to kick-start a music career and now helps steer as a global superstar. Acharia also joined the venture capital company Trinity Ventures before launching her own fund, A-Series Management and Investments, where she was an early investor in companies like ClassPass and Bumble.

Yet unfinished business gnawed at her. "Music is a place that makes me feel like I'm home, and fusion music makes me feel like I'm being seen," she says. Acharia spoke to other labels last year about the idea for 5 Junction, but Kyncl personally convinced her to bring the project to WMG. She will work closely with Warner Records CEO Aaron Bay-Schuck and COO Tom Corson, as well as GM Jurgen Grebner, who steered international marketing at Interscope for over 20 years, and Alfonso Perez-Soto, who served as WMG's emerging markets leader before recently becoming executive vp of corporate development.

Although Acharia was removed from the major-label world for years, some of its most prominent executives believe she's the perfect steward for this ocean-spanning endeavor. Corson describes her as "a powerful force who is extremely well-connected across the world. We hit it off from the jump, and we're thrilled to be in business with her." Kyncl says that, if he were to describe the "ideal entrepreneur," that person would resemble Acharia. "You have a vision, you're strategic about it and you won't stop until you win," he says. "She has it. It makes absolute sense for us to partner with her, and she'll make us better by pushing us."

HER TIES TO KYNCL ASIDE, Acharia says that WMG made the most sense as a home for 5 Junction because the label group is "way ahead" in the scene. Since WMG created Warner Music India five years ago, the label has partnered with Diljit Dosanjh, a Bollywood superstar with 25 million Instagram followers who has headlined North American arenas; Karan Aujla, a former songwriter turned singer/rapper/YouTube behemoth; and Kushagra, a 20-year-old indie-pop newcomer whose single "Finding Her" is currently one of India's biggest streaming hits.

When Jay Mehta became managing director of Warner Music India in April 2020, he was a team of one; now, the label has 34 employees. Part of that growth had to do with timing, as the market quickly expanded globally. Last decade, "India was dominated by Indian streaming services, which did not have a global footprint," Mehta explains. "Spotify launched in India in 2018, and it took until 2021, 2022 for them to become the leaders [in the country]. We needed Spotify and YouTube to have massive presences in India in order to take artists global."

Acharia also points out that subtle cultural shifts in North America helped fuel opportunities. "Think about all the foreign-language content on Netflix and other streaming platforms that people have watched — especially during COVID, where people were stuck at home," she says. "And then, with vertical video, people are watching things with subtitles all the time ... Everything affects each other. We're more used to hearing foreign languages, so we're more OK to listen to it in our music."

At 5 Junction, Acharia will work closely with Mehta's Warner Music India team, which has utilized streaming data to identify artists who can transcend international borders and songwriting camps to supply them with global hits. Fatehi, a Toronto native of Moroccan descent who moved to India and became a marquee Bollywood act, signed a deal with WMG in early 2024 to help her level up as a singer, dancer and actor. "The larger goal was always to go global, to let the whole world know my story," she says. When she met Acharia, Fatehi told her that she wanted to become a cross-cultural entertainer along the lines of Jennifer Lopez, and Acharia told her, "Yes, let's do it together."

Fatehi says she has never met anyone more persuasive than Acharia. "I feel like our hungers align," she says. "It's hard to take a vision and sell it to someone else, because most people don't have an attention span to listen to you for more than five minutes. But when [Anjula] opens her mouth and starts her pitch, you somehow have FOMO — you feel like you're going to miss out if you're not paying attention."

In January, Fatehi released the Jason Derulo collaboration "Snake," a thumping dance track built around East Asian melodies. It has earned 18.5 million official on-demand streams globally, according to Luminate; one month after its release, Aujla was featured on "Tell Me," a OneRepublic collaboration that has earned 28.8 million global streams.

More than two decades after Jay-Z and Panjabi MC linked up, Acharia still believes these types of collaborations are key for breaking South Asian artists in North America. "The strategy that I had 15 years ago was cross-pollination, but we didn't have the infrastructure to support that," she says. Now creative borders are easier to cross. For instance, Fatehi and Derulo met up in Morocco to film a music video for "Snake" that combined hip-hop and Bollywood choreography. And after King recruited Nick Jonas for a new version of the former's smash "Maan Meri Jaan" in 2023, King made a surprise appearance during the Jonas Brothers' performance at Lollapalooza India in 2024 to perform it, a "cinematic" moment that he says he still can't believe actually happened.

At the same time that Western artists are paying more attention to India as a touring market — Coldplay performed in the country for the first time in January, grossing $30.5 million across five shows in Mumbai and Ahmedabad, according to Billboard Boxscore — South Asian artists are more clearly identifying North American territories where thousands of fans will show up to their shows. Acharia name-checks New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Austin, but also says that Canadian cities have demonstrated "huge" ticket demand. After Dosanjh scored his first top 10 album in Canada with 2023's *Ghost*, his Dil-Luminati tour last year became the highest-grossing North American tour by a Punjabi music artist in history, thanks in part to sold-out stadium shows at Vancouver's BC Place and Toronto's Rogers Centre.

Perez-Soto sees Toronto, where the metro area had a South Asian population of more than 1.1 million as of 2021, as a crucial gateway for the rest of North America. "South Asian music through Toronto, like Latin music was through Miami, has established an important bridge between the local origin of the music and the second generation," he says. "They have this hybrid vision of culture, where things are getting mixed up and mutually enriched."

Kyncl has kept WMG focused on these macro-trends for years. "It's not like we're just starting," he says. "It's just that Anjula is adding an additional element, which is bringing talent here." Under her guidance, Fatehi is spending most of April in the recording studio and will issue the follow-up to "Snake" by the end of the month, with a mix of releases aimed at Eastern and Western markets throughout the year. Meanwhile, King says he is "working on an EP and some collaborations" to follow his January single "Stay," in addition to multiple Bollywood projects.

Mehta believes that an Indian artist will make an impact on the U.S. mainstream charts in 2025. "We saw it with Hanumankind, on the back of a viral moment," he says, referencing the Indian rapper's 2024 track "Big Dawgs," which exploded on TikTok and peaked at No. 23 on the Billboard Hot 100. "But we want to make a consistent way of bringing a lot of these artists onto the charts. The U.S. is extremely competitive, but if we get the right sound representing the culture and the right artist, with Anjula's strengths, we should be able to make something big happen."

Acharia knows this will take time, but for her, the personal stakes are worth the investment. She was once told that Desi Hits wouldn't last; now, 5 Junction could define her legacy. "It's something that I started, and I want to finish it," she says. And for his part, Iovine is proud that the world has finally caught up to her vision.

"I'm not surprised at all at any of her success," Iovine says, "and I'm glad she's doing this now."

ACHARIA: HAIR AND MAKEUP BY SHAYLI NAYAK

RIAA
FOR MUSIC
billboard
TOP MUSIC LAWYER
2025 HONOREE
CONGRATULATIONS
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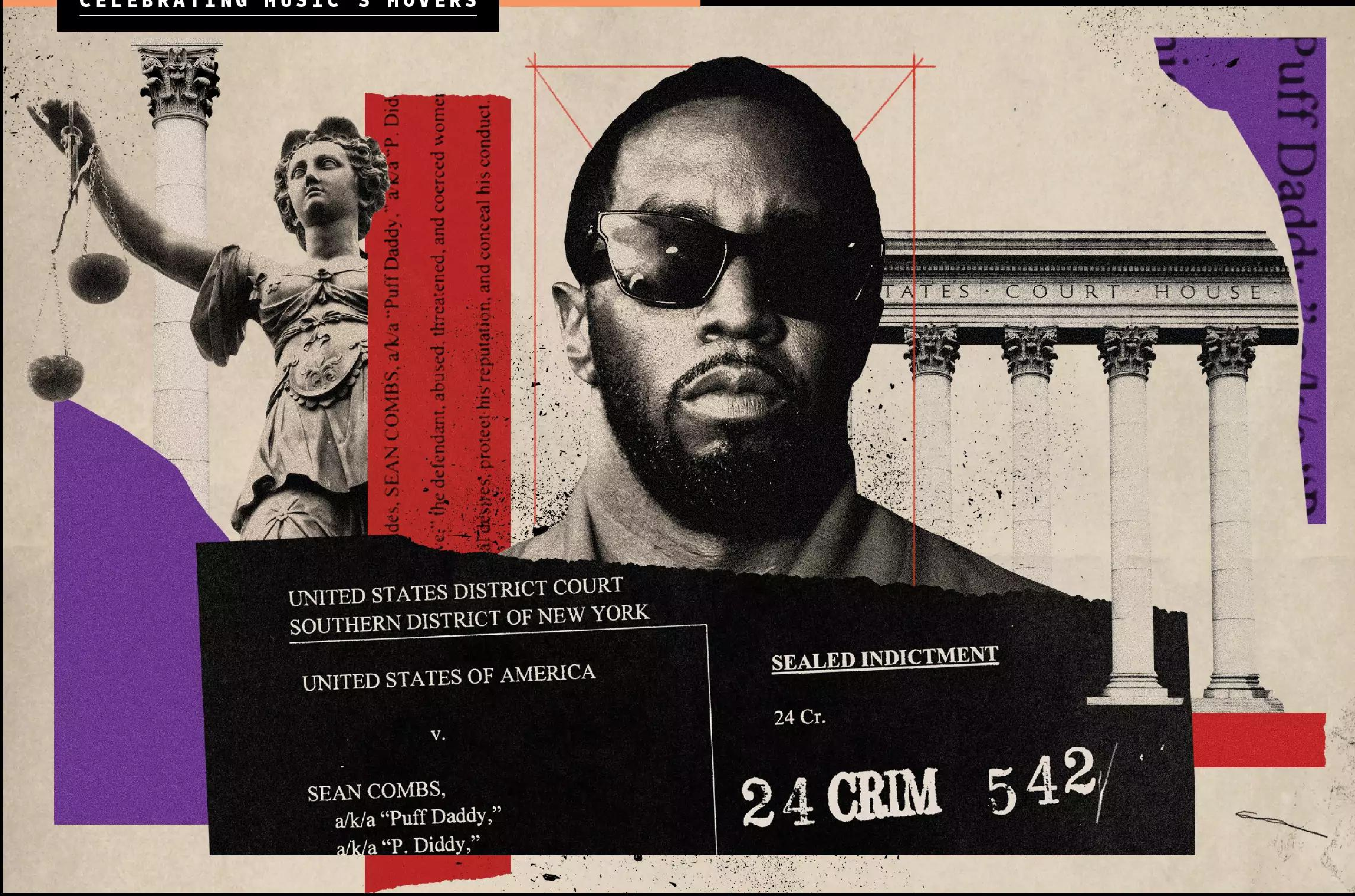
PHOTO COURTESY OF OTHELLO BANACI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a/k/a "P. Diddy,"
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2025

TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

While the case of Sean "Diddy" Combs is the legal story of the year in the music industry, it's business as usual for top attorneys who are making deals, guiding clients and watching out for AI

BY BILL DONAHUE

ILLUSTRATED BY ALVVINO

NO LEGAL STORY CAPTIVATED the music industry more in the past year than the downfall of Sean "Diddy" Combs — the once all-powerful hip-hop mogul who now faces horrific accusations of sexual abuse.

Starting with a lawsuit from his ex-girlfriend in late 2023, a slow stream of allegations against Combs gave way to a flood — including dozens of individual civil cases and a sprawling criminal prosecution centered on federal charges of sex trafficking and racketeering. Combs has denied all accusations and pleaded not guilty in the criminal case.

When the trial in the criminal case starts in a Manhattan federal courthouse — it is currently scheduled to begin in May — the whole music world will be watching. "Whether these allegations are true or not, the story is fascinating to people," says Howard King, a top music attorney who has worked in the hip-hop space for decades. "It's can't-miss stuff."

Before the claims against Combs became public, he had reached heights matched by few others in the industry — as a hugely successful artist and producer, as a music executive at his Bad Boy

Records and as a businessman behind popular brands of clothing, vodka and more. In the wake of the litigation, Combs is already facing the imminent loss of much of that once-formidable business empire; if convicted at a trial, he also faces the prospect of a life prison sentence.

"He was at the top. He had made so much money from his label and his apparel and everything else," King says. "They say, 'The higher you are, the bigger the fall.' Well, Combs couldn't have been any higher in the business. It's a spectacular fall."

Spread across a complex criminal case and civil lawsuits in multiple jurisdictions, the Combs debacle unsurprisingly involves a slew of high-powered lawyers, ranging from veteran defense attorneys to experienced sex-crimes prosecutors to a prolific plaintiff's lawyer who says he represents more than 100 victims. And that's not even mentioning the Big Law attorneys hired to defend top industry players who have been dragged — they say wrongly — into the messy litigation.

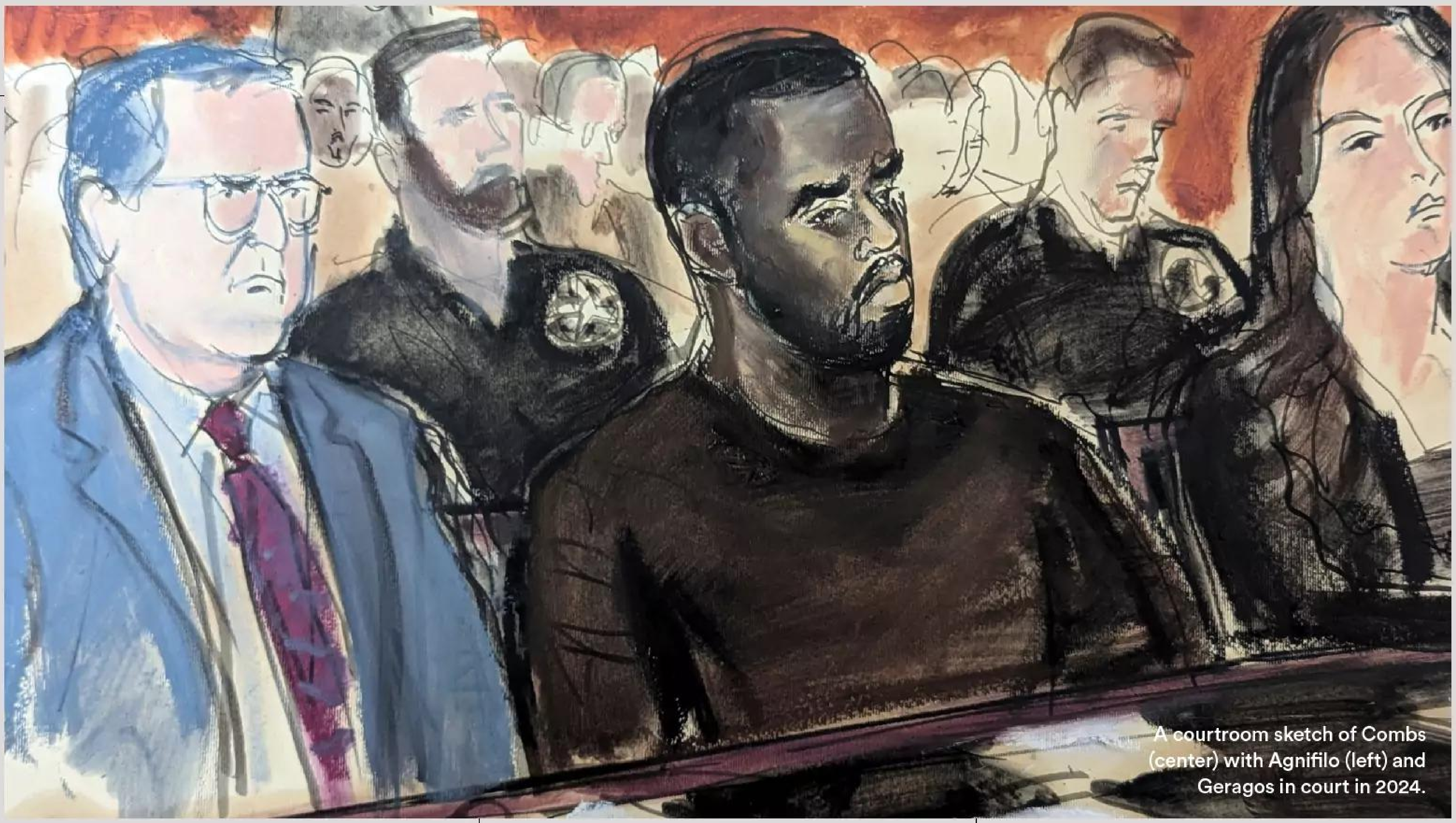
Combs himself is represented in the criminal case by Marc Agnifilo, a former prosecutor and longtime criminal defense attorney with an extensive background in handling the kind of complex, high-profile charges that Combs now faces.

After a stint at the Manhattan district attorney's office, Agnifilo spent several years as a federal prosecutor in New Jersey, targeting organized crime like the Mafia and the Bloods. Not coincidentally, many of those cases centered on the same federal RICO law (the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act) that the feds are now using against Combs, whom they allege built a vast crime syndicate to facilitate sexual abuse.

After leaving the government, Agnifilo spent nearly two decades working for prominent New York defense attorney Ben Brafman — a lawyer who himself repped Combs for years, including during his earliest abuse cases in 2023. At Brafman's firm, Agnifilo represented clients including Martin Shkreli, the so-called "Pharma Bro" convicted of securities fraud in 2017, and Keith Raniere, the leader of the upstate New York sex cult Nxivm.

Though Agnifilo lost the Nxivm case (Raniere was convicted in 2019 and sentenced to 120 years in prison), it could still provide valuable insights. Like the case against Combs, the charges against Raniere were part of a recent trend of prosecutors using the RICO statute, a law typically more associated with mobsters and drug cartels, against powerful men who allegedly commit mass-scale sex crimes with the aid of a criminal enterprise.

Rounding out the defense team are Teny Geragos, another Brafman alum (and daughter of celebrity attorney Mark Geragos) who joined Agnifilo when he left to start his own firm last year, and Alexandra Shapiro, a well-known appellate law specialist. The team previously included Anthony L. Ricco, another leading New York defense attorney, but he withdrew in February for undisclosed reasons.


A courtroom sketch of Combs (center) with Agnifilo (left) and Geragos in court in 2024.

The charges against Combs were filed last year by Damian Williams, the top federal prosecutor for Manhattan, who is known for cases against cryptocurrency entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried, former U.S. senator Bob Menendez and New York Mayor Eric Adams. Following the election, President Donald Trump has said he'll fill that post — vacated when Williams resigned in December — with Jay Clayton, a corporate attorney at a prestigious Big Law firm who headed the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission during the first Trump administration.

Unlike the case against Adams — which was controversially dropped in early April — there has been no indication that Trump or Clayton plan to back away from Combs. The same attorneys under Williams (Meredith Foster, Emily A. Johnson, Christy Slavik, Madison Reddick Smyser and Mitzi Steiner) are all still on board, and the district attorney's office has since added Maurene Comey — one of the lead prosecutors in the sex trafficking case against Ghislaine Maxwell, a top accomplice of Jeffrey Epstein.

Of course, the criminal case is only part of the story. Dozens of civil lawsuits have also been filed against Combs since late 2023 seeking monetary damages from the rapper over a wide range of alleged wrongdoing, including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sex trafficking, emotional distress and employment violations.

Due to the sheer volume of cases, the use of Doe pseudonyms and the potential for duplicates across jurisdictions, it's hard to isolate an exact number of lawsuits. But court records indicate that at least 70 have been filed across the federal judiciary and New York and Los Angeles courts, with more potentially filed elsewhere.

The very first came from Combs' ex-girlfriend Cassie Ventura, who alleged in November 2023 that he had repeatedly abused her over their decadelong relationship, including one instance of rape. That lawsuit, which came with an unusual "trigger warning" and introduced the now-infamous term "freak off," ended in a settlement just a day after it was filed. But it started a cascade of accusations and litigation against Combs that hasn't stopped since.

In that case, Ventura was represented by Douglas Wigdor, a well-known plaintiff's attorney who rose to prominence during the #MeToo movement by filing lawsuits against Harvey Weinstein and Fox News. Later, after Ventura's case was settled, Wigdor filed a second case against Combs in December 2023, representing a woman who said the star raped her in 2003 when she was just 17 years old. Combs has denied the allegations.

An avalanche of cases followed Ventura's lawsuit. Legendary civil rights attorney Gloria Allred sued Combs on behalf of Thalia Graves, who claims he raped her in his New York studio in 2001. Lisa Bloom, Allred's daughter and a high-profile attorney in her own right, filed another suit for Dawn Richard, a member of the Bad Boy-signed Danity Kane, who claims he harassed and assaulted her during "years of inhumane working conditions." Combs has denied the allegations.

One case, filed by ex-Combs producer Rodney "Lil Rod" Jones, initially named Universal Music Group and its chairman/CEO, Lucian Grainge, as co-defendants, accusing them of aiding and abetting Combs' alleged misconduct. Repped by Donald Zakarin from the firm Pryor Cashman, UMG and Grainge blasted those claims as "recklessly false" and threatened to pursue sanctions against the attorney who had filed them. Weeks later, that lawyer, Tyrone Blackburn, conceded there had been "no legal basis" for the allegations and asked to have them "withdrawn immediately."

No one has filed more Combs lawsuits than Tony Buzbee, a Houston-area lawyer who announced at a press conference in October that he was representing 120 alleged victims. Buzbee, who previously brought two dozen sexual abuse cases against NFL star DeShaun Watson, has since filed at least 40 lawsuits on behalf of men and women who say Combs victimized them.

In one, Buzbee made the headline-grabbing decision to add Jay-Z as a co-defendant, accusing him in December of joining Combs in the rape of a 13-year-old girl in 2000. Jay-Z vehemently denied those accusations and turned to Alex Spiro, a prominent litigator at Quinn Emanuel known as an aggressive advocate whose clients have included Adams, Elon Musk, Megan Thee Stallion and Alec Baldwin. Spiro went scorched-earth in defense of Jay-Z, not only attacking the lawsuit in a flurry of filings but launching a multipronged counteroffensive against Buzbee himself. First Jay-Z sued the attorney for extortion and defamation, and then he sued Buzbee's client over similar claims. Buzbee and his client have denied any wrongdoing.

That campaign hasn't always gone smoothly. Buzbee filed his own case against Quinn Emanuel, claiming the firm has been harassing his former clients. In late December, a judge admonished Spiro for his "relentless filing of combative motions containing inflammatory language and ad hominem attacks," saying it was inappropriate and "unlikely to benefit his client."

But it's hard to argue with the results. While the case against Buzbee remains pending and a judge indicated he'll allow parts of it to proceed to trial, his client voluntarily dropped her case against Jay-Z in February — a move Spiro quickly said had occurred without any kind of payment.

"By standing up in the face of heinous and false allegations, Jay has done what few can," Spiro said in a statement at the time. "He pushed back, he never settled, he never paid one red penny, he triumphed and cleared his name."

ELIZABETH WILLIAMS/AP IMAGES

Congratulations to

JASON BOYARSKI
DAVID FRITZ

on being named to

billboard

TOP MUSIC LAWYERS 2025

[BF] Boyarski Fritz LLP
Attorneys At Law

PETE STILL/REDFERNS

MUSIC GROUPS

Jeffrey Harleston
GENERAL COUNSEL/EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Martha Braithwaite
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Saheli Datta
EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER AND EMPLOYMENT

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Steve Gawley
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

REPUBLIC COLLECTIVE, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Jason Kawejsza
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

INTERSCOPE CAPITOL LABELS GROUP, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Nicola Levy
EXECUTIVE VP OF DIGITAL BUSINESS AFFAIRS

Alasdair McMullan
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/HEAD OF LITIGATION

Michael Seltzer
FORMER EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF COMMERCIAL TRANSACTIONS FOR BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

Generative artificial intelligence continues to evolve and, for the second year running, was what UMG's legal team spent the most time on, filing or participating in lawsuits against AI firms Anthropic, Udio and Suno over the past year. "We believe in responsible AI and have been working to ensure that our artists can explore the creative opportunities provided by AI in an 'ethical context' … 'in the service' " of the artist, Harleston says. UMG also expanded digital licensing deals with several streaming and social partners that Harleston says align with UMG's Streaming 2.0 agenda by "embracing artist-centric principles that better benefit artists and songwriters." (Seltzer, who is recognized for his work in the past year, has since left UMG.)

Most pressing issue "Working with artists to support their creative vision across all formats and platforms," Harleston says, "so they can effectively engage with their superfans globally."

Sony Music's acquisition of **QUEEN**'s catalog last year — reportedly worth more than $1 billion — spotlighted the value of name and likeness rights.

Paul Robinson
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL

Brad Cohen
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF LITIGATION/ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL

Jon Glass
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF DIGITAL LEGAL AFFAIRS

Trent Tappe
SENIOR VP/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL/CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER

Michael Kushner
Maryrose Maness
SENIOR VPs/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSELS

Dana Sheahan
VP/HEAD OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

WARNER MUSIC GROUP

WMG kicked off February with two big announcements: the $450 million acquisition of a controlling stake in Tempo Music Investments' catalog and a new deal with Spotify that included a direct licensing component with Warner Chappell Music. Robinson says the legal team covering mergers and acquisitions, led by Sheahan, and the digital legal team, led by Glass, "pulled back-to-back all-nighters" working with the corporate and business development teams to meet the deadline of announcing the deals the same day as the company's quarterly earnings. "[It was] an excellent example of our team's skill and work ethic," Robinson says.

Most pressing issue "Finding ways to simplify digital licensing for the benefit of the entire music ecosystem," Robinson says. "Music companies and streaming services operate globally, yet much of the digital licensing framework remains highly localized."

Julie Swidler
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS/GENERAL COUNSEL

Wade Leak
EXECUTIVE VP/DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL/CHIEF COMPLIANCE, ETHICS AND PRIVACY OFFICER

James Mullan
EXECUTIVE VP OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNSEL

Jeff Walker
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, GLOBAL DIGITAL BUSINESS

Stephanie Yu
EXECUTIVE VP/HEAD OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS LEAD

David Jacoby
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF U.S. LITIGATION

Susan Meisel
SENIOR VP/CORPORATE DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL

Michael Roberson
SENIOR VP OF U.S. BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

Sony Music's acquisitions of Queen's and Pink Floyd's catalogs last year — reportedly worth more than $1 billion and $400 million, respectively — spotlighted the value of name and likeness rights. Sony had worked with both bands for decades and was keen to consolidate its ownership of their songs. The acquisitions positioned Sony to create new ways to interact with the "priceless" music digitally, says Sony Music Entertainment CEO Rob Stringer, who explains, "We think *Dark Side of the Moon* or *Thriller* or 'Bohemian Rhapsody' or *Born To Run* [by Bruce Springsteen, whose catalog Sony acquired in 2021] … are going to be experientially very exciting for generations, certainly well beyond mine."

Most pressing issue "Artist deals. In the music industry, it takes years for artists to develop, but there is growing interest in signing shorter deals," Stringer says. "This may hinder the process and time needed to nurture the development of these creators."

STREAMING

Kevan Choset
INTERIM GENERAL COUNSEL

Darren Schmidt
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL/GLOBAL HEAD OF RECORD LABEL LICENSING

Sofia Sheppard
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL/GLOBAL HEAD OF LICENSING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

SPOTIFY

Spotify began this year with a bang by renewing its licensing agreements with Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group — deals that Choset says reflect the company's belief that innovation is crucial to making subscriptions more appealing to a global audience while also improving artist remuneration. "These multiyear deals require complex legal structuring to support new licensing frameworks and revenue models that benefit artists, songwriters and rights holders, enabling innovations like new paid subscription tiers, bundled music and nonmusic content, and richer audio and visual content catalogs," he says. "With nearly $60 billion paid to rights holders to date, our legal and strategic work continues to expand the value of music on our platform."

Advice about AI now "The key is to balance innovation with responsibility," Choset says. "Consider not just what AI can do, but what it should do."

Jon Cohen
SENIOR CORPORATE COUNSEL
Stephen Worth
HEAD OF LEGAL/ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL
Cyrus Afshar
Nicolas Gauss
ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSELS

AMAZON MUSIC

In November, Amazon Music Unlimited began offering subscribers in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada one audiobook title per month from the vast collection on Amazon-owned Audible. "We worked quickly and effectively to offer this new benefit to customers," Afshar says, "and now we're proud to say that Amazon Music Unlimited customers have access to more than 1 million audiobooks in the U.S., and more than 800,000 in the U.K. and Canada, included with their subscription."

Charity I support "As an L.A. resident, it was incredibly rewarding to work on bringing the Los Angeles FireAid Benefit performances to life on Amazon Prime Video this past January," Afshar says. "FireAid raised in excess of an estimated $100 million to support those in our community affected by the devastating fires, bringing both hope and showing the power of music as a unifying force."

Jordan Fasbender
EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER/SECRETARY
Jon Kurland
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS/CHIEF ENTERTAINMENT COUNSEL

IHEARTMEDIA

Along with traditional deals like iHeartMedia's exclusive audio partnership for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, which yielded original coverage and podcast programming, the company's legal team helped "drive iHeart's expansion into immersive music experiences" over the past year, as Kurland puts it. That included an exclusive Meta Horizon Worlds virtual reality concert capture of Charli xcx and Troye Sivan's Sweat arena tour and supported Coldplay's interactive Fortnite experience for its Billboard 200 No. 1 album *Moon Music*, which Kurland calls "an interactive blend of music and gaming that brought fans deeper into Coldplay's world." He adds, "These projects showcase iHeart's leadership in innovative audio experiences, amplifying cultural moments at an unprecedented scale."

Most pressing issue "As streaming and digital continue to grow," Kurland says, "ongoing collaboration among stakeholders is essential to ensure sustainable profitability while also fairly compensating artists and rights holders."

Kevin Montler
VP OF GLOBAL MUSIC, LEGAL

YOUTUBE

YouTube calls itself "the new television" and boasts of "robust 'twin engines' of growth with advertising and subscription-based services," Montler says of the "freemium" business model that has helped YouTube reach an estimated 2.5 billion monthly users globally and attract 125 million subscribers to YouTube Music and Premium combined. Operating on such a large scale requires working with a worldwide web of rights holders and organizations. "In the past year, we have developed a strong portfolio of global licensing deals with labels, publishers and societies," he adds. Meanwhile, looking at the industry overall, Montler acknowledges that a challenge remains in "creating sustainable distribution models that reward artistic contribution and recognize how people use music today as technology evolves."

Charity I support "The Alzheimer's Association. I've seen the disease steal people's vitality firsthand."

Ama Walton
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL

SOUNDCLOUD

Walton touts SoundCloud's partnerships with a variety of pioneering AI music services, including FADR, Soundful, Voice-Swap, Tuney, Tuttii and AIBeatz, as part of the company's effort to "further democratize music creation." She says that leading the charge on these agreements has been rewarding because they are helping the company "provide user-friendly access to cutting-edge and ethical AI tools" that empower a diverse array of voices to create and easily share music on the service. "I've been deeply involved in navigating evolving regulations, championing ethical AI compliance and safeguarding intellectual property to ensure we're building a sustainable future for AI-supported creativity," Walton says.

Most pressing issue " 'Growing the pie' to expand revenue opportunities for creators and fans alike should be a key music business priority. Streaming is not enough to meet the needs of artists and fans in the streaming age."

Robert Windom
CHIEF CONTENT COUNSEL
Elizabeth Miles
SENIOR LEGAL DIRECTOR OF APPLE MEDIA SERVICES
Adam Blankenheimer
PRINCIPAL COUNSEL OF APPLE MEDIA SERVICES

APPLE

Apple Music's new slate of subscriber offerings kept its legal team busy in the last year. The attorneys helped put together deals to bring features like Apple Music Classical to CarPlay and assisted in the launch of three live-hosted genre radio stations for Latin, dance and chill music on the service. On top of that, "we handled the talent deals and licensing for Apple Immersive Video music pieces on Apple Vision Pro with artists such as Alicia Keys, RAYE and Metallica," Blankenheimer says. "Bringing music to life in this kind of groundbreaking, mind-blowing way is the sort of work we love to do." Apple Music's paid subscribers total about 54 million in the United States and 115 million in the rest of the world.

The music industry today in a word "High volume," Blankenheimer says.

LIVE

Michael Rowles
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL

LIVE NATION ENTERTAINMENT

After several years of lobbying and preparation, Live Nation and Ticketmaster have begun implementing all-in pricing at the venues and festivals the company owns and tickets, "ensuring fans see the full ticket price up front," explains Rowles, who has served as the concert promoter's in-house attorney since 2006. "We've been advocating for all-in pricing for years, and it's encouraging to see support in both houses of Congress and adoption in a number of states," says Rowles, who has been lobbying Congress to make all-in pricing U.S. law as part of a larger ticketing reform package that would ban deceptive practices, give artists greater control over ticket resale and strengthen enforcement of the BOTS (Bolstering Online Transparency) Act.

Advice about AI now "Use AI to create efficiencies and reduce costs, but don't become overreliant on it."

Shawn Trell
EXECUTIVE VP/COO/GENERAL COUNSEL

AEG

Earlier this year, AEG opened The Pinnacle — a 4,500-capacity live-music and event venue anchoring the 19-acre mixed-use development Nashville Yards in Tennessee. (Kacey Musgraves performed at its inaugural concert on Feb. 27.) The venue is owned by the Yards development through a partnership between Southwest Value Partners and AEG Real Estate and is operated by AEG Presents. "The Pinnacle in Nashville is something we're exceptionally proud of," Trell says. "The reception from the city, the artists, the fans and the music community has been great across the board." Next up for AEG is a flexible, 2,500- to 4,000-seat venue in Portland, Ore., in development with local promoter Monqui Presents — which Trell says "continues to build on The Pinnacle's tail wind" — and a 4,000-capacity indoor venue in Austin's River Park development.

The attorneys at iHeartMedia supported the interactive Fortnite experience for **COLDPLAY**'s Billboard 200 No. 1 album *Moon Music*.

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

The Warner Chappell Music legal team has celebrated the breakthrough successes of hits including **SHABOOZEY**'s "A Bar Song (Tipsy)," which tied the record for most weeks (19) at No. 1 on the Hot 100.

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

PUBLISHING

Peter Brodsky
EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/GENERAL COUNSEL
Jonas Kant
SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS
Nicole Giacco
SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS/ETHICS AND COMPLIANCE OFFICER
Michael Abitbol
SENIOR VP/HEAD OF U.S. DIGITAL
SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING

SMP's attorneys facilitated Sony Music's Queen catalog acquisition, deal extensions with Usher and Lainey Wilson, new agreements with hit-makers like Mike Dean and more. "We've also continued to advocate for songwriters across major and emerging digital platforms, while also navigating strategy around AI and copyright protection," Abitbol says. And as the AI age is dawning, Abitbol remains optimistic following a recent ruling in favor of copyright holder Thomson Reuters in its case against Ross Intelligence. "It is a useful precedent that will hopefully encourage courts to reach the same conclusion in cases involving generative AI models," he says.
Most pressing issue "As subscriber growth in major markets begins to slow down," Abitbol says, "it is crucial that we find growth in emerging markets and license new business models."

Stephen Dallas
SENIOR VP OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS, GLOBAL DIGITAL STRATEGY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Don Glista
VP OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS AND CREATIVE AFFAIRS
Kerrigan Hennings
Ira Hoffman
VPs OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS
Angelica Merida
VP OF BUSINESS/LEGAL AFFAIRS, INTERNATIONAL AND DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING GROUP

UMPG's team of attorneys began 2025 with a massive win: The publisher was the first to make a deal with Spotify that improved streaming rates for its songwriters since the service's bundling of music and audio books cut royalty rates in March 2024. "It's a great example of finding common ground so that all boats are raised in the rising tide," Hennings says. But Dallas notes the team is also constantly "seeking the best terms possible for our songwriters and stakeholders" as it works with TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, SoundCloud and other platforms. Meanwhile, UMPG's team continues to secure catalog deals, sign new talent and re-up its current roster.
Charity we support "A colleague at UMPG, Tyler Gutowsky, heads up a foundation called Handle With Care," Hennings says, "whose stated purpose is to deliver everyday necessities — socks, food, water, blankets — in care packages that they create and distribute in real time to local homeless populations."

Peter Rosenthal
EXECUTIVE VP/GLOBAL HEAD OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS
Steve Butler
HEAD OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS FOR NORTH AMERICA
Chris Head
Tim Meade
SENIOR VPs OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS
Chris White
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS
WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

Among the highlights for the WCM team this past year was the company's acquisition of the controlling stake in Tempo Music Investments. "It exemplifies our approach to collaborate across our central, recorded-music and publishing teams to bring in the catalogs of Philip Lawrence, Tyler Joseph, Wiz Khalifa, Florida Georgia Line and others," Rosenthal says. The WCM legal team has also celebrated the breakthrough successes of artists like Shaboozey, Benson Boone, Teddy Swims and Rosé. Shaboozey's hit "A Bar Song (Tipsy)" tied the record for most weeks (19) at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, while Boone's "Beautiful Things" was No. 1 on the 2024 year-end Global 200 and Global Excl. U.S. charts.
Advice about AI now "It's still helpful to view [AI] through basic first principles of copyright law," Rosenthal says. "Does the AI process or its output implicate the rights holder's exclusive rights to make copies, to adapt or prepare derivative works, to distribute or to publicly perform or display?"

RIGHTS GROUPS

Christos Badavas
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL
SESAC MUSIC GROUP

Badavas has spent the past year leading the legal work behind upsizing SESAC's entire business securitization and the group's October acquisition of media software and services company HAAWK. He has also been involved with SESAC's continued expansion of partnerships outside the United States, including with Soundreef in Italy, as well as the Korean Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers to take over licensing of repertoire in South Korea in an initiative that builds on SESAC's collaboration and joint ventures with the Asian societies through the Asian Alliance Music Rights Organization.
Most pressing issue "Streaming fraud [remains] a problem that impacts the payouts for legitimate songwriters and artists," Badavas says. "Addressing such fraud is a focus of major labels, industry organizations and digital music providers. As a result, I expect the industry to continue to consider new rules to curb artificial consumption in 2025 and add some new guardrails around streaming fraud."

Tim Dadson
GENERAL COUNSEL
SOUNDEXCHANGE

Dadson has been busy working on the Web VI rate proceeding that will set rates and terms for webcasters to stream sound recordings for the period of 2026-30, he says, adding that it "is of paramount importance to the recording artists and rights owners that SoundExchange represents." He notes that he and his team are "always working diligently on licensing and enforcement to ensure that digital service providers are paying creators what they owe" — such as the organization's ongoing lawsuit against SiriusXM for allegedly withholding over $150 million in unpaid royalties by bundling satellite and web streaming services. SiriusXM has challenged the claims.

Most pressing issue "As companies seek to capture the attention of the public, music is frequently used to augment, enhance or simply be the product, but more often than not, the artists and rights owners behind that music see diminishing returns for their work."

Clara Kim
EXECUTIVE VP/CHIEF LEGAL AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS OFFICER
ASCAP

"ASCAP continues to be focused on closing music-licensing deals that deliver the most value to our members," Kim says, noting that ASCAP recently announced the highest reported revenue and distributions for any performing rights organization in 2024, with $1.835 billion in revenue collected and $1.696 billion available for royalty distributions. She adds that "90 cents of every revenue dollar is going back to creators because we, by our own governance, do not keep any profits and we don't have any investors we have to pay."

The music industry today in a word "In flux. The ever-increasing launch of new technologies, including generative artificial intelligence and applications and services that use music, has required every executive in the music industry to be hyper-aware of changes in the business landscape and in legal and regulatory regimes to operate successfully."

Rick Marshall
GENERAL COUNSEL
MECHANICAL LICENSING COLLECTIVE

The Music Modernization Act requires that every five years, the MLC undertakes a review of the organization's designation as the exclusive administrator of the compulsory blanket mechanical license. Its filing to the U.S. Copyright Office highlighted the successes and achievements since launching in 2018, Marshall says. "The ongoing review process also highlighted the overwhelming support that the MLC has received from its diverse group of stakeholders, including the number of individual rights holders and dozens of respected songwriter advocacy, publisher and industry organizations that filed public comments and expressed their support of the MLC," Marshall adds.

Most pressing issue "The detection and prevention of fraudulent activity remains a top priority for the industry, and continued collaboration is key to strengthening efforts in this area. By working together, the industry can enhance fraud-detection systems and enforcement strategies to better protect artists, songwriters and other stakeholders from the effects of fraud."

Stuart Rosen
SENIOR VP/CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER
BMI

One year after investment firm New Mountain Capital acquired BMI, the benefits of that historic deal still yield dividends, Rosen says. "Partnering with New Mountain Capital last year was the most consequential event of my 28 years at BMI," he says. "We now have the ability to invest and build an even bigger and better BMI, all to the benefit of our incredible roster of songwriters, composers and publishers." In September 2024, BMI filed a rate court action against SiriusXM to maintain fair compensation for its members. SiriusXM has challenged the petition.

Advice about AI now "Accept that AI is not going to go away or be legislated out of existence. Instead, consider how it can help in your creative process, all the while fighting for attribution and compensation."

Global Music Rights extended its relationships with songwriters including **POST MALONE,** who spent six weeks atop the Hot 100 in 2024 with "I Had Some Help," featuring Morgan Wallen.

JASON KEMPIN/GETTY IMAGES

Emio Zizza
GENERAL COUNSEL
GLOBAL MUSIC RIGHTS

Zizza's main focus has been recruiting more artists in Global Music Rights' fight for proper compensation from digital service providers. In addition to welcoming young rap stars like Yeat to the roster, Zizza oversaw the extension of the company's relationship with several other songwriters, including Post Malone, who spent six weeks atop the Hot 100 in 2024 with "I Had Some Help" (featuring Morgan Wallen). "GMR's very existence is based on the fact that creators deserve to be valued better than they have historically," Zizza says. "It's a fundamental problem, but if [digital service providers] properly recognize the value of creators, it's a fixable problem."

Advice about AI now "AI is a tool and that tool can be used for good or not. Artists should embrace all the ways that AI benefits them creatively but at the same time aggressively defend against the ways that artists can be exploited — and/or underpaid — by technology companies and other corporate interests."

ASSOCIATIONS

Danielle Aguirre
EXECUTIVE VP/GENERAL COUNSEL
NATIONAL MUSIC PUBLISHERS' ASSOCIATION

"This year, the NMPA has been focused on our lawsuit against Twitter/X for its refusal to license the music on its platform," Aguirre says. The publishers trade association is also fighting "Spotify's bad faith move to significantly reduce songwriter royalties" after the streaming giant added audiobooks and reclassified some subscriptions as "bundles." Plus, the NMPA issued takedown notices in February to some 2,500 podcast episodes that allegedly contain unlicensed music. "Both matters demonstrate that DSPs still disregard the importance of songwriters' contributions to the success of their platforms and refuse to pay fairly for the works that drive their platforms' value," she says.

Most pressing issue "The overregulation of our music copyrights. Copyright owners must be able to negotiate rights in a free market instead of under burdensome and constraining rules and regulations."

Ken Doroshow
CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER
RIAA

As AI keeps rapidly transforming the music industry from the recording studio to the Grammy stage, the RIAA's top attorney is on the front lines for creators. Last year, Doroshow oversaw the filings of the first-ever lawsuits challenging the use of copyrighted sound recordings to train generative AI music services, taking on AI firms Suno and Udio for alleged copyright infringement. "A mature and sustainable AI industry needs to license the content that is so vital to its development — including copyrighted sound recordings — in the free market so that artists, songwriters and rights holders can have a voice in how their work is used and be fairly compensated for these valuable materials," he says.

Charity I support "Several, but I'll call out Bread for the City. It's a wonderful organization that provides broad services and support for low-income residents of the District of Columbia."

Ryan McWhinnie
VP OF BUSINESS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS
MERLIN

McWhinnie cites closing the indie rights group's first AI pilot program with a global leader in the space as part of its inaugural Merlin Connect deal as a major milestone, accomplished with the support of Merlin senior director of business and legal affairs Shrina Patel. The deal is a "pioneering platform designed to help emerging tech platforms access an expansive library of high-quality independent music," McWhinnie explains. It reflects Merlin's "commitment to innovation, ensuring that independent music remains at the forefront of new technological developments, with partners who want to be on the right side of history about copyright, consent and culture."

Most pressing issue "Market consolidation. As major players continue to seek to offset falling market share by acquiring independent labels, we're seeing an increasingly concentrated market, which raises concerns about competition, artist opportunities and the long-term diversity of the music business."

TALENT & LITIGATION

Ken Abdo
Paul Bowles
Cynthia Katz
Tim Mandelbaum
Michael Reinert
Leron Rogers
Alex Threadgold
Heidy Vaquerano
PARTNERS
FOX ROTHSCHILD

The firm's clients span artists, labels and investment firms, including Kobalt Music, BMG, Primary Wave, Concord, Litmus, Iconoclast, Stevie Wonder, Wu-Tang Clan, $uicideboy$, Raphael Saadiq, Stone Temple Pilots, Mötley Crüe, Better Noise Music, Trace Adkins, Three Dog Night and Kool & The Gang. Mandelbaum highlights Fox Rothschild's work with HarbourView Equity Partners, where over the past year, "our team handled a $500 million debt financing for HarbourView that was backed by its music royalties catalog. This was among the music industry's biggest deals of the past year."

Most pressing issue "The music landscape is shifting away from major labels, which once dominated, and toward independent DIY music creation and distribution," Mandelbaum says. "In this social media-driven world, it is increasingly hard for major labels to nurture and develop talent, let alone break new artists and sustain their careers."

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

Attorneys at Rimon won a trademark lawsuit last year against an **EARTH, WIND & FIRE** tribute act that used the legendary band's name without permission.

Jenny Afia
PARTNER
SCHILLINGS

As a leading attorney involved in privacy protection, Afia is fiercely protective of the reputations of those she represents — including megawatt artists like Adele, Madonna, Michael Bublé and Elton John — and cites "dis- and misinformation" that threatens "artists' license to operate" as one of the biggest issues facing stars today. To that end, Afia says one of her major accomplishments this past year was resolving a looming crisis for a "global house music act facing a cancel culture campaign" that ended in a public apology, retraction of false information on which the claim was based and the act's reputation remaining intact.

Charity I support "I'm on the U.K. advisory board of Common Sense Media, which works to improve the internet for children."

Lisa Alter
Katie Baron
PARTNERS
ALTER KENDRICK & BARON

Alter and Baron, who count Primary Wave Music, BMG Rights Management, Steve Miller, Kenny Gamble & Leon Huff, Paul Rodgers and other top industry names as clients, handled numerous big deals over the past year — including repping Iconic Artists Management in the acquisition of Rod Stewart's song catalog and acting as music counsel to Influence Media Partners in connection with an asset-backed securitization deal. Looking ahead, the firm is concerned about the threat posed by the "unchecked" power of tech companies and widespread deregulation, Alter says.

Advice about AI now "The implications of AI should be considered and addressed at the deal-making phase of every music transaction," Alter says, "together with the respective rights of the parties to monetize content through the training of AI models."

Jonathan Altschul
MANAGING ATTORNEY
THE ALTSCHUL FIRM

Altschul advised As1One Production Co. in connection with the Paramount+ docuseries *As1One: The Israeli-Palestinian Pop Music Journey*, which debuted in December and was created in association with Best Production Co. for MTV Entertainment Studios. The four-part project details the creation of as1one, the first pop group comprising both Palestinian and Israeli members, as well as the band's move to Los Angeles in October 2023 and its journey amid the ongoing war in Gaza. While Altschul does not name individual talent clients, he has represented companies on the corporate side such as Simon Fuller's XIX Entertainment and South Korea's SM Entertainment.

Advice about AI now "Artists need to be more vigilant about the grants of rights involving their recordings and the right to use their likenesses and voices contained in most recording agreements and releases," Altschul says. "Artists should avoid allowing others unfettered rights to use their voices and recordings to train AI systems."

Ken Anderson
Jill Berliner
Ray Garcia
Mark Lee
Celeste Moy
PARTNERS
RIMON

Rimon boasts a star-studded roster of clients, including iconic bands like Soundgarden, Foo Fighters and Nirvana, as well as entities affiliated with late stars like Frank Sinatra and Warren Zevon. Representing legendary R&B group Earth, Wind & Fire, attorneys at Rimon won a trademark lawsuit last year against a tribute act that used the band's name without permission. The firm is also repping the Beastie Boys in an ongoing copyright case claiming the restaurant chain Chili's used the rap trio's iconic 1994 song "Sabotage" in a social media advertisement without permission. According to the suit, "deceased Beastie Boys member Adam Yauch included a provision in his will prohibiting such uses."

Most pressing issue "What is next in the 'golden age of the arts'? The current administration's gutting of the Kennedy Center and determination of what music is suitable for consumption by Americans could have a significant impact on the industry," Lee says.

Peter Anderson
PARTNER
DAVIS WRIGHT TREMAINE

Davis Wright Tremaine's clients include the three major-label groups and artists such as Mariah Carey, Cher, Cardi B and Miley Cyrus. The firm scored a major victory for Cher last May in a closely watched copyright matter over the singer's half share of royalties on classic Sonny & Cher hits including "The Beat Goes On" and the No. 1 Hot 100 single "I Got You Babe." Sonny Bono's widow, Mary, "claimed that a Copyright Act notice of termination that she had sent to a number of publishers cut off Cher's rights under her and Sonny's 1978 marital settlement agreement," Anderson says. "We sued for declaratory relief, arguing that Ms. Bono conflated copyright interest with a contractual right to royalties." A federal judge found in Cher's favor, and the case will now go to trial on the issue of the amount owed to her.

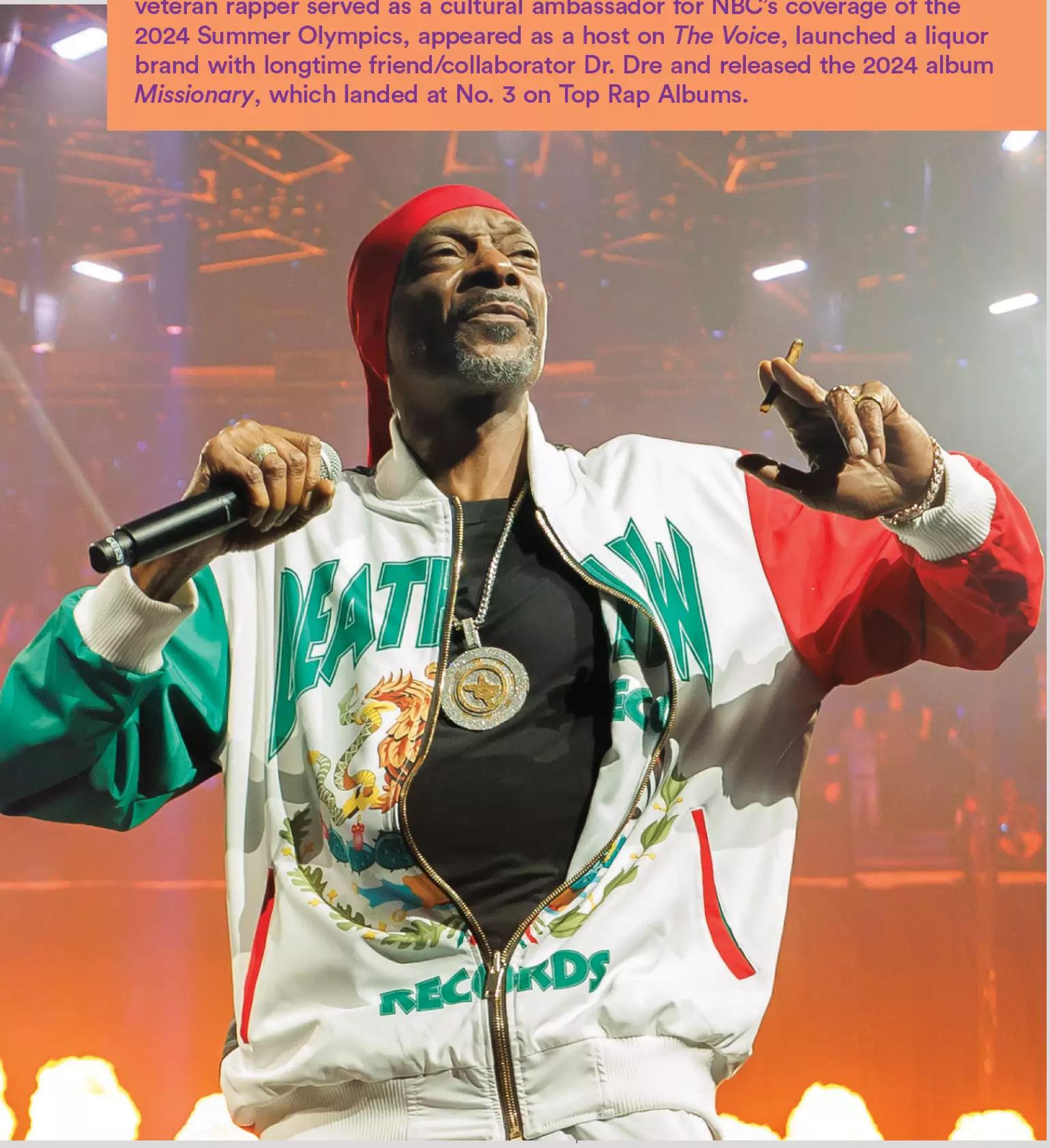
The music industry today in a word "Evolving."

Gerard M. Anthony
FOUNDING PARTNER
ANTHONY LAW GROUP

As lawyer for Gabe P's trendsetting rap freestyle platform, On the Radar Radio, Anthony helped negotiate OTR's deal with beverage company Monster, ensuring that it "not only provided for branding support but touring and showcase resources," he says. A longtime legal adviser to the Afropunk Music Festival, Anthony negotiated and helped produce its first edition with Seattle public radio station KEXP. "The lineup featured a good mix of local artists and also headliner Cautious Clay that had not been featured in the market, despite a strong fan base," he recalls. Other clients include rappers 22Gz and Poiison, singer-songwriter Raheem DeVaughn, producer KatoOnTheTrack and musicians Jack Freeman, 2forwOyNE, Luxury Lane and The Colleagues.

Most pressing issue "Royalty payments. Artists and producers in particular still have to go through archaic payment systems to receive royalty payments."

Attorney Stephen D. Barnes has represented **SNOOP DOGG** as the veteran rapper served as a cultural ambassador for NBC's coverage of the 2024 Summer Olympics, appeared as a host on *The Voice*, launched a liquor brand with longtime friend/collaborator Dr. Dre and released the 2024 album *Missionary*, which landed at No. 3 on Top Rap Albums.



CHRISTOPHER POLK FOR BILLBOARD

Marvin Arrington Jr.
Vince Phillips
FOUNDING PARTNERS
Aurielle Brooks
PARTNER
ARRINGTON & PHILLIPS

Arrington & Phillips represents a roster of artists in genres ranging from hip-hop to country. YoungBoy Never Broke Again, Kevin Gates, Keri Hilson and country artist Kevin Smiley all benefit from the firm's guidance. Among its recent work is the "groundbreaking negotiation" to clear the AI sample on Sexyy Red and Drake's hit single "U My Everything," Phillips says. "The track debuted at No. 44 on the Billboard Hot 100, marking the first-ever clearance of an AI-generated 'BBL Drizzy' sample in music history."

Most pressing issue "Big tech. Artists now rely heavily on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, etc.," Phillips says, "but changing algorithms and pay-to-play models make organic reach unpredictable. Viral success is often random, making career longevity hard to maintain."

Craig Averill
Jeff Worob
Laxmi Vijaysankar
PARTNERS
SERLING ROOKS HUNTER McKOY WOROB & AVERILL

With a roster that includes Maroon 5, Bailey Zimmerman, LCD Soundsystem, Zac Brown Band, Jason Isbell, Maggie Rogers, Leon Bridges, Interpol and producer Dave Cobb, Vijaysankar says high points of the firm's work in the past year include representing STEM Disintermedia in the company's distribution matters and advising longtime watch collector John Mayer on his "landmark collaboration" with luxury watchmaker Audemars Piguet. "Mayer was appointed creative conduit, advising the CEO and [chief marketing officer] on future directions and strategies in the luxury watch world," she says of the deal, which included Mayer helping to design the Royal Oak perpetual calendar wristwatch.

Most pressing issue "The power of music to shape culture cannot be overstated," Vijaysankar says. "It transcends boundaries and influences social change. Fostering inclusive and equitable representation in business is essential and should persist regardless of the reversals taking place in other industries."

Akinyemi Ayinoluwa
FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER
HIGHTOWER SOLICITORS AND ADVOCATES

Ayinoluwa says that Hightower — which represents major Afrobeats producers including Magicsticks (Asake), Ragee (Davido), Damie (BNXN), Rexxie (Zlatan) and Blaq Jerzee (Mr. Eazi) — "recently finalized a publishing agreement between Empire Music and Ragee," who co-produced Chris Brown's "Sensational." The track was nominated for best African music performance at the 2025 Grammy Awards for both featured artists Davido and Lojay. Ayinoluwa says, "This achievement, the result of many months of negotiation, exemplifies Hightower's commitment to guiding clients in building viable music catalogs."

Most pressing issue "In 2025, the fate of independent recording artists is uncertain, as the major record labels have started acquiring the label services and music distributor companies that once afforded independent artists a fair shot at controlling their destinies."

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE

The firm Ziffren Brittenham has represented **BEYONCÉ** for her *Renaissance* tour, the sale of concert film *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé* to AMC, all aspects of her Grammy-winning album *Cowboy Carter* and an agreement with the NFL and Netflix for the creation of the Christmas Day halftime show Beyoncé Bowl.

Ed Baden-Powell
Nick Eziefula
Paddy Gardiner
Ben Gisbey
Tom Iverson
Euan Lawson
Ed Weidman

PARTNERS

SIMKINS

Simkins clients include rights society PRS for Music, Universal Music Group and the estates of David Bowie and Freddie Mercury. The firm is also representing Experience Hendrix and Sony Music in the well-publicized claim for ownership of copyrights, related rights and royalties by the heirs of Jimi Hendrix's former bandmates in The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell. Redding and Mitchell — both represented by estates since their deaths in 2003 and 2008, respectively — originally signed away their rights in the early 1970s following Hendrix's death.

Most pressing issue "Wall Street and the City of London continue to show a great interest in the music business," Lawson says. "But with all that interest comes heightened performance expectations, so the industry needs to continue to find ways to grow, but in a sustainable manner, ensuring that new talent is not overlooked in favor of catalog artists."

Hector Baldonado

FOUNDER

THE BALDONADO GROUP

The Baldonado Group "closed several catalog sales, placed record executives at the major record labels and closed high-level merchandising and touring deals," Baldonado says. Notably, the firm — which represents Rod Wave, Lil Durk, Moneybagg Yo, Yovng Chimi, Bossman Dlow, untiljapan, Jorjiana, BuVision, Great Day Records and the estate of Juice WRLD — closed the BuVision label deal that formed a partnership between record executive Abou "Bu" Thiam's label and Atlantic Music Group. Baldonado also directly negotiated his executive role with Atlantic CEO Elliot Grainge and worked on the Juice WRLD-Fortnite collaboration. For the latter, an avatar of the late rapper appeared in Fortnite to debut a new song, "Empty Out Your Pockets," alongside Eminem, Snoop Dogg and Ice Spice.

Charity I support "Children of Promise NYC. Supporting young children affected by parental incarceration through targeted initiatives is a pivotal step in changing the course of a family's history."

Stephen Barnes

SENIOR PARTNER

YORN LEVINE BARNES KRINTZMAN RUBENSTEIN KOHNER ENDLICH GOODELL & GELLMAN

Barnes represents Snoop Dogg, who may be the busiest man in show business. Over the past year, he acted as a special correspondent and cultural ambassador for NBC's coverage of the 2024 Summer Olympics, appeared as a host on *The Voice*, launched liquor brand Gin & Juice with longtime friend/collaborator Dr. Dre and released *Missionary*, his first Dre-produced album since his debut, *Doggystyle*, that landed at No. 3 on Top Rap Albums. (In March, Snoop was announced as the commencement speaker at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business.) Barnes also represents Death Row Records, Jill Scott and comedians Chris Rock and Kevin Hart.

Charities I support "Cancer Support Community Los Angeles, The Girl Friends and Reading Partners of Los Angeles."

Richard Baskind

HEAD OF MUSIC

Alasdair George
Anthony Orum

PARTNERS

SIMONS MUIRHEAD BURTON

Simons Muirhead Burton represents a wide array of artists including NEMZZZ, Alan Walker and RØMANS, as well as producers P2J, Sammy SoSo and Ari Pensmith, all three of whom have worked with Tyla. The firm also repped Lola Young's label imprint, Day One, as the British singer-songwriter broke through with her top 20 Hot 100 hit single "Messy." Additionally, it represents music companies such as Cooking Vinyl, Kobalt Music and NWS Group. Orum points to the joint venture between Firebird Music and Yungblud's Locomotion/Special Projects team (which reportedly will have Firebird invest tens of millions of dollars in YungBlud's business) as a major achievement of the past year.

Charity we support "Death Penalty Project — a pro bono team associated with Simons Muirhead Burton that represents death row convicts and campaigns internationally for the abolition of capital punishment," Orum says. "In 2024, the team secured dancehall legend Vybz Kartel's release from prison after 15 years."

Jeffrey Becker

CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LAW PRACTICE GROUP

SWANSON MARTIN & BELL

Becker continued his firm's work representing the estates of legends including Aretha Franklin and Frankie Knuckles, as well as working with rising artists such as Natalie Jane and WesGhost. He spent much of the past year working with legislators to strengthen the Right of Publicity Act in Illinois, which Becker says is "now one of the few states in the country to prohibit the use of artificial intelligence to replicate an artist's voice or image for use in sound recordings and videos without their prior consent." Other highlights include helping sign Ax and the Hatchetmen to Arista Records, while representing frontman Axel Ellis in his deal to star in the musical teen drama *The Runarounds* for Amazon Prime.

Charity I support Becker founded Sound of Summer, an annual charity concert held in Chicago, which has raised thousands of dollars to support a variety of music-related nonprofits including Musically Fed, She Is the Music, Soundgirls and, this year, the Save the Music Foundation.

David Bercuson

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT

DAVID BERCUSON

Bercuson has long represented KC & The Sunshine Band, InnerCat Music Group and Farruko and his label, Carbon Fiber Music, among others. In the past 12 months, he added Colombian stars and couple Greeicy and Mike Bahia to his roster, as well as reggae clients Buju Banton, Alkaline and Jovi Rockwell. Bercuson also negotiated the use of Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again" for a dancing plush toy and is assisting clients named as defendants in the massive *dembow* lawsuit, in which Jamaican duo Steely & Clevie are suing more than 150 artists including Bad Bunny, Karol G, Pitbull, Drake, Daddy Yankee, Luis Fonsi and Justin Bieber over their use of the duo's dembow rhythm.

Charities I support "The Anti-Defamation League, ACLU and Southern Poverty Law Center to protect democracy, freedom and the rights of all people and to eliminate hate."

Jason Berger

PARTNER

Matt Cottingham

NASHVILLE CO-MANAGING PARTNER

LEWIS BRISBOIS BISGAARD & SMITH

Throughout 2024, along with continuing to provide representation to clients including Wyatt Flores and Fridayy, Berger and Cottingham helped platinum-selling artists Tucker Wetmore and BNYX negotiate new recording contracts with their respective labels. Meanwhile, both partners have set their sights on getting their clients fairly paid, with Cottingham stating the music industry as it stands today should be working on "finding a solution to adequately compensate songwriters in the digital streaming era, while navigating the practical limitations within the current framework of the major-label system."

Charity I support "ACM Lifting Lives," Cottingham says. "As a member of the ACM board of directors and a passionate supporter of the country music community, ACM Lifting Lives is near and dear to my heart. Lifting Lives provides aid in times of need to those in the industry, with a focus on health-related initiatives."

PHOTO: PIPER FERGUSON

"Becoming A Great Lawyer Is Not Just About Mastering The Law, It's About Embodying Integrity and Service."

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF MY FELLOW COLLEAGUES BEING RECOGNIZED. OUR WORK MAY NOT BE EASY, BUT WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

HELEN YU, ESQ.

YU LESEBERG
A PROFESSIONAL LAW CORPORATION
LAWYERS *for the* DIGITAL MILLENNIUM

Jason Boyarski

FOUNDING PARTNER

David Fritz

PARTNER

BOYARSKI FRITZ

Boyarski Fritz has been behind numerous noteworthy deals recently, including renegotiating Lil Tecca's deal with Republic Records, Blackpink member Jisoo's first solo major-label deal with Warner Records and label deals for Will Smith and Tainy. The firm also negotiated a catalog sale encompassing publishing, masters and neighboring rights for a former founding member of Maroon 5; deals for a documentary about Earth, Wind & Fire and founding member Maurice White; branding and touring deals for Interscope artist Towa Bird, including her opening slot on Billie Eilish's tour; and multiple producer and songwriter deals for top hit-makers like Louis Bell, Pete Nappi, Cirkut and Karl Rubin.

Most pressing issue "The transformation of traditional record deals — where labels owned the masters — into licenses and distribution-type models where the artists own the masters," Boyarski says.

John Branca

PARTNER/HEAD OF MUSIC DEPARTMENT

David Byrnes

David Lande

PARTNERS

ZIFFREN BRITTENHAM

After working with Beyoncé on her highest-grossing trek to date, the *Renaissance* world tour, including negotiations with Live Nation to promote the run's 56 stadium dates, Ziffren Brittenham handled legal aspects for the sale of the concert film *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé* to AMC. The firm also has handled all legal aspects of her Grammy-winning album *Cowboy Carter* and negotiated the agreement with the NFL and Netflix for the creation of the Christmas Day halftime show Beyoncé Bowl. In addition, Ziffren Brittenham negotiated with Netflix for the production and distribution of Olivia Rodrigo's concert film and oversaw the *GUTS* star's endorsement deal with Lancôme. To top it off, Ziffren Brittenham worked on SZA's *SOS Deluxe: Lana* release, including the singer's distribution deal with RCA.

Advice about AI now "As an industry," Lande says, "we need to create ways in which artists can legitimately and permissibly use AI in the creative process."

William Briggs

Joshua Rosenberg

PARTNERS

VENABLE

With a client roster boasting A-list performers like Ariana Grande, The-Dream and Sony Music Entertainment, Venable provides legal representation for some of music's biggest stars. Most recently, Rosenberg has been defending client Jason Derulo and SME against a joint authorship claim over Derulo's 2020 No. 1 hit "Savage Love (Laxed — Siren Beat)," for which he recently sought a summary judgment. Rosenberg also points to cybersecurity cases he's working on where anonymous hackers are stealing and selling artists' demos to the highest bidder. "This is not only an egregious invasion of the artists' personal privacy," he says, "but also a threat to derail the artists' creative process and business plan where they control the release of their music rather than these cyber criminals."

Advice about AI now "Be prepared to both fight and adapt," Rosenberg says. "Napster showed that some things are inevitable."

Attorneys Elliot Groffman and Paul Gutman at Carroll Guido Groffman Cohen Bar & Karalian advised on the work between **BRANDI CARLILE** (right) and **JONI MITCHELL**, culminating in the Joni Jam show at the Hollywood Bowl.

Jordan Bromley

LEADER OF MANATT ENTERTAINMENT

Robert Jacobs

LEADER OF ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION

L. Lee Phillips

SENIOR PARTNER

W. Joseph Anderson

Binta Niambi Brown

Eric Custer

Gary Gilbert

Beau Stapleton

PARTNERS

MANATT PHELPS & PHILLIPS

A recent point of pride for Manatt Phelps & Phillips — which represents Rosé, Neil Young, Jack White, the Pop Smoke estate and others — was its pro bono legal services for FireAid, the January benefit concert that raised over $100 million for wildfire relief in Los Angeles. "Our team helped identify and solicit sponsors and then drafted, advised on, negotiated and closed over 50 sponsorship deals and 20-plus streaming agreements to bring the concert to various platforms," Bromley says. "We also drafted and negotiated venue, production services and other related agreements in addition to overseeing all talent deals and advising on rights and clearance issues."

Advice about AI now "Be unique, be consistent and be yourself," Bromley says. "Artificial intelligence is not a replacement for the unbridled and incomparable creativity of people, but it is becoming more and more prevalent and accessible."

Vernon Brown

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT

V. BROWN & ASSOCIATES

When some of Brown's most notable clients — like Cash Money Records co-CEOs Ronald "Slim" Williams and Bryan "Birdman" Williams — first started releasing music, consumers bought physical albums and singles. Now most fans simply open a streaming app, and that has changed the way artists and labels make money. Brown believes the fair compensation surrounding that change is the most pressing issue facing the music industry today. "In this streaming era, the current revenue model heavily favors major labels and platforms. Artists only get fractions of a cent per stream, which means they can't make real money unless they hit absolutely massive streaming numbers," he says. "Further compounding this issue: Most artists don't understand how their royalty payments are calculated, and there's very little transparency about it."

Richard S. Busch

PARTNER IN THE LITIGATION SECTION/HEAD OF THE ENTERTAINMENT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY SECTIONS

KING & BALLOW

Busch has made a name for himself litigating complex copyright infringement cases, usually against digital services. He is representing Eight Mile Style (owner of songs written in whole or in part by Eminem) against Spotify in a copyright infringement action involving more than 240 musical compositions, which also includes the claim that certain provisions of the Music Modernization Act are unconstitutional. The judge in that case ruled against Eight Mile Style while avoiding the constitutional questions raised by the complaint, and Busch is appealing that decision. In another action, Busch represents a list of comedians including Andrew Dice Clay, George Lopez, Lewis Black, the heir of Bill Hicks and the estates of Robin Williams and George Carlin against Pandora for allegedly infringing their copyrighted literary works through distributing their content without obtaining performance or mechanical licenses for the underlying spoken word compositions.

The music industry today in a word "Unequal."

RANDALL MICHELSON/LN-HEWITT SILVA

RBKF&S

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

ROSSI BALDIVIA KLEIN FINE & SPECTOR

CONGRATULATES

**OSWALDO ROSSI, JOHN BALDIVIA,
PAM KLEIN & GARY FINE**

on being named to

billboard

TOP MUSIC LAWYERS 2025

Rosemary Carroll
Michael Guido
Elliot Groffman
Rob Cohen
Gillian Bar
Renee Karalian
Ira Friedman

PARTNERS

CARROLL GUIDO GROFFMAN COHEN BAR & KARALIAN

Achievements abounded among the firm's honorees (who were assisted by fellow partners Paul Gutman, Dave Keady, Celine Hollenbeck and Jenna Kon). Carroll advised Patti Smith regarding the 50th anniversary of her seminal album *Horses*, which will be celebrated by tours in Europe and the United States, plus the release of a box set including original demos. Guido represented FKA twigs in branding deals, as well as Mark Ronson on his move to Universal Music Publishing Group. Groffman, with Keady, negotiated a deal for Phish at Las Vegas' Sphere and, with Gutman, advised on Brandi Carlile's work with Joni Mitchell, culminating in the Joni Jam show at the Hollywood Bowl. Cohen represented Sabrina Carpenter in all aspects of her career, including her Netflix holiday special, Meta virtual reality concert, first arena tour and partnerships with Versace and Prada. Bar negotiated contract extensions for The National with 4AD, Gracie Abrams with Interscope Records and PinkPantheress with Sony Music Publishing; struck Aaron Dressner's new deal with UMPG; and celebrated Jack Antonoff's band Bleachers selling out Madison Square Garden. Karalian represents Mustard in his hit-making production projects, including his work on Kendrick Lamar's "Not Like Us," and also assisted with the release of Playboi Carti's Billboard 200 No. 1 album *MUSIC*. Friedman represented Alicia Keys in various deals, among them the negotiation of the cast album for her Broadway musical, *Hell's Kitchen*.

Uwonda Carter
Donald Woodard

FOUNDING PARTNERS

CARTER WOODARD

The Atlanta-based firm had a hand in some of the most notable hip-hop and R&B releases of the past year, from Carter negotiating Metro Boomin's publishing agreement with Universal Music Publishing Group (which yielded a pair of No. 1 collaborative albums with Future) in 2024 to Woodard representing producers like Dernst "D'Mile" Emile II and Christopher "Tricky" Stewart, who both contributed to Usher's *Coming Home* album. In addition, Woodard's representation of King Willonius, whose viral hit "BBL Drizzy" sampled an AI-generated track, has turned him into a key figure in discussions surrounding AI and copyrights in the music business.

Michael Cataliotti

PRINCIPAL

CATALIOTTI LAW

Cataliotti Law represents "multiple music industry executives at the vp, senior vp, executive vp and C-suite levels; Grammy-nominated producers, writers and performers; and internationally recognized chart-topping recording artists and writers-producers, as well as supporting members from audio engineers to managers," according to Cataliotti, though he declines to detail his recent achievements due to "the nature of the work." Skilled in immigration law, Cataliotti provides guidance for clients entering the United States and coordinates and supports them as they move around the globe. He expresses concern about "the political volatility that exists worldwide and the amount of incorrect, inaccurate and incomplete information that floods the conversations and policy-making halls."

Attorney Sandra Crawshaw-Sparks of Proskauer Rose represents the estate of **QUINCY JONES.** The musician, songwriter, producer, conductor, arranger, artist, record-label owner/executive, TV/film producer, magazine publisher and philanthropist died in November.

AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Robert A. Celestin

FOUNDING PARTNER

Alicia Ferriabough Taylor

PARTNER

THE LAW OFFICES OF ROBERT A. CELESTIN

Country superstar Shaboozey was everywhere in 2024 — and Celestin's firm negotiated high-level branding opportunities on behalf of the "A Bar Song (Tipsy)" singer, including a Super Bowl ad with Nerds, a Cash App commercial and what Celestin describes as "the biggest endorsement deal [Jack Daniel's has] done with a multigenre artist." He adds that those deals wouldn't have been possible had it not been for the artist's broad appeal: "Shaboozey bridged the gap between country, pop and hip-hop in a way that has never been seen before."

The music industry today in a word "Perfunctory," Celestin says. "The music industry is in a bit of a struggle to make culturally relevant, impactful and thoughtful music. Aside from a few artists like Kendrick Lamar and Chappell Roan, the industry seems to be focused on finding the quick, viral one-hit wonders via algorithms rather than developing artists who have something substantive to say."

Ross J. Charap

PARTNER

BARTON

Charap recently moved from the firm ArentFox Schiff to Barton, where he advises BMG Rights Management U.S., Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, and the estates of Billy Preston, Harold Arlen, Jessye Norman and pioneering hip-hop producer Larry Smith Sr., among others. Along with his former partner, ArentFox Schiff's Matthew Finkelstein, Charap says, "On behalf of the Stones and BMG, my team successfully challenged a distribution rule of the Mechanical Licensing Collective that resulted in terminated publishers continuing to receive MLC royalties after their rights had been terminated." After intervention by the U.S. Copyright Office (which oversees the MLC), "all writers or their families who have exercised their termination rights will receive all post-termination royalties," Charap says, "as well as a refund of all such royalties previously misdirected."

Most pressing issue "The dilution of royalty payments across the board."

Jacqueline Charlesworth

PARTNER

FRANKFURT KURNIT KLEIN & SELZ

Charlesworth joined the entertainment litigation group at Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz's Los Angeles office in September, bringing with her a deep knowledge of copyright law. The one-time general counsel of the U.S. Copyright Office previously ran her own boutique firm in Los Angeles for five years. She represented Malcolm McLaren's publisher, Satisfaction Fulfilled, and peermusic, the work's administrator, in their case against Sony Music Publishing over the usage of the World's Famous Supreme Team's 1984 R&B hit, "Hey DJ," co-written by McLaren, in Lizzo's "About Damn Time." On behalf of the plaintiffs, Charlesworth won back the co-owner's rights to the song from a publisher that had claimed full ownership of the sampled material.

Advice about AI now "If you use AI tools in creating songs, make sure there's enough human authorship to register the songs for copyright."

billboard
TOP MUSIC LAWYERS
2025

the hachar
law group

Pierre Hachar, Jr., Esq. | Cody Pellicer, Esq.

☎ 305-200-1308 @hachargroup | @redcarpetlaw

Jay Cohen
PARTNER
PAUL WEISS RIFKIND WHARTON & GARRISON

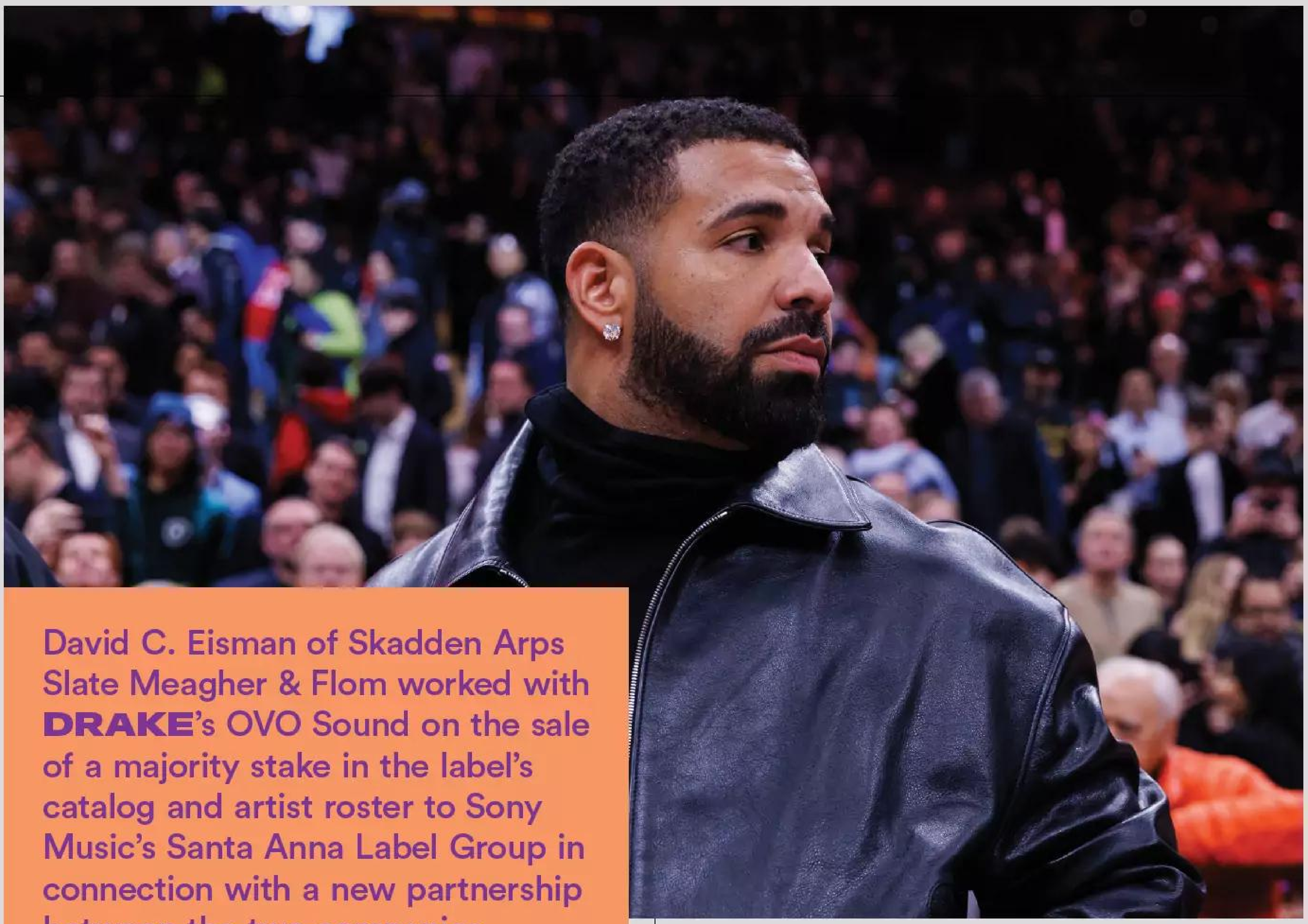
"I currently represent ASCAP in high-stakes rate court litigation against the Radio Music License Committee concerning the licensing fees to be paid by commercial radio stations," Cohen says, noting that he's also representing the Mechanical Licensing Collective in "a case alleging Spotify systematically revised its subscription structure" to deny artists royalties. As the industry evolves, the protection of artists' royalties in the face of domineering corporations remains paramount — and Cohen is helping lead that fight. He also represents the National Music Publishers' Association, Sony Music Entertainment and StubHub.
Charity I support "I am the chairman of the board of Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts in New York. It is the oldest and largest provider of pro bono representation to artists and arts organizations and plays a vital role for the vast bulk of creators who cannot afford to pay lawyers to protect their work and livelihood."

Sandra Crawshaw-Sparks
SENIOR PARTNER
Anthony Oncidi
CO-CHAIR OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT LAW DEPARTMENT/HEAD OF WEST COAST LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE
PROSKAUER ROSE

Crawshaw-Sparks says that her firm "recovered more than $60 million for our clients for the unlicensed use of their content on social media. We also defended Live Nation and Madonna in multiple class actions arising from The Celebration Tour." One suit claimed the music legend harmed her fans by starting concerts in New York later than scheduled. Proskauer Rose still represents the Recording Academy and Sony Music Entertainment in connection with multiple ongoing litigation, arbitration and advice/counseling matters, as well as the estate of Quincy Jones.
Charities I support "L.A. wildfire relief because the wildfires were devastating to the music industry and greater L.A.," Crawshaw-Sparks says, and "the Wildlife Society and Kitten Rescue — because they're kittens, for Pete's sake!"

Sy Damle
Gabe Fleet
Andrew Gass
Alli Stillman
Jonathan West
Joe Wetzel
PARTNERS
LATHAM & WATKINS

"The Latham team recently secured a significant win for Spotify in a first-of-its-kind federal lawsuit against the Mechanical Licensing Collective over royalty payouts for bundled music service offerings in a case closely watched by the entire digital streaming music industry," Stillman says. "The [Spotify] decision for the first time interprets a regulation governing how digital music services pay mechanical royalties, which was a key part of the settlement of the Phonorecords IV rate-setting proceeding before the Copyright Royalty Board." That victory was a major achievement for the firm, which also represents the Digital Media Association, the North American Concert Promoters Association, the Digital Licensee Coordinator and Live Nation in its ongoing antitrust lawsuit brought by the U.S. Department of Justice.
Most pressing issue "There is a lot of focus on competition and revenue distribution in the digital streaming era," Stillman says.



David C. Eisman of Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom worked with **DRAKE**'s OVO Sound on the sale of a majority stake in the label's catalog and artist roster to Sony Music's Santa Anna Label Group in connection with a new partnership between the two companies.

COLE BURSTON/GETTY IMAGES

Robert Darwell
HEAD OF GLOBAL MEDIA
Alexis Robinson
LEADER OF THE ENTERTAINMENT, TECHNOLOGY, MEDIA AND ADVERTISING PRACTICE GROUP/CO-LEADER OF THE MUSIC TEAM
Daniel Schnapp
PARTNER/CO-LEADER OF THE MUSIC, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, INTERACTIVE MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSACTIONS TEAMS
SHEPPARD MULLIN RICHTER & HAMPTON

On behalf of Domain Capital Group, the team at Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton oversaw deals to acquire the catalogs of Iggy Azalea, composer Andrew Bissell and country/pop songwriter Ashley Gorley, while also negotiating for Gorley's future catalog on behalf of Sony Music Publishing. Robinson says the team "represented financiers and producers in connection with the sale to Paramount Pictures of the North American theatrical rights to the Robbie Williams biopic, *Better Man*. Paramount's $25 million domestic acquisition fee makes it one of the biggest indie sales in years." Additional notable clients of the firm include ASCAP, Steinway Musical Instruments, Bandsintown, the Songwriters Hall of Fame and Spotify.
The music industry today in a word "Remixing," Robinson says. "The industry is splicing old models with new tech and sampling from different business verticals."

Doug Davis
FOUNDER
THE DAVIS FIRM

The Davis Firm represents a broad roster of clients including artists Pitbull, DJ Snake, LL COOL J, Lil Jon, Barry Manilow and Dionne Warwick, as well as executives like Ron Perry, Jorge Mejia, Ezekial Lewis, Ryan Press and Jeannette Perez. Davis is particularly proud of his involvement in bringing LL COOL J back to Def Jam Records in 2019 and the rapper's first new release since his return, 2024's *The FORCE*, which notched a top 10 debut on Top Rap Albums. "It was such a personally rewarding experience when LL invited me to his press day and acknowledged my role in supporting the effort to make the album realized," Davis says. "He is a gem and representing him remains a privilege."
The music industry today in a word "Resilient. The music industry is constantly evolving, adapting to new technologies, shifting business models and changing audience behaviors."

Jacob Ebin
Paul Fakler
PARTNERS
MAYER BROWN

Fakler describes the music industry as "complex," as demonstrated by its representation of Pandora Media in a "cluster of copyright infringement cases brought by nine comedians or their estates in the Central District of California" who claim that it and other streaming services failed to obtain sufficient rights to the underlying comedic material. "Despite decades of industry custom and practice to the contrary," Fakler says, there was an effort "to impose the music industry's byzantine licensing practices on the comedy industry." He adds, "The case will make new law on various topics related to sound-recording licensing and the comedy industry."
Advice about AI now "Don't panic," Fakler says. "And do not allow the panic strategically generated and exploited by content owners to bully you into rash and ill-conceived 'solutions' — whether legislative or contractual — to a problem that is not fully understood and may not be a problem at all."

Scott A. Edelman
CHAIRMAN/PARTNER OF LITIGATION AND ARBITRATION GROUP
Atara Miller
PARTNER OF LITIGATION AND ARBITRATION GROUP/MEMBER OF GLOBAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
MILBANK

Milbank secured a victory on behalf of its client BMI against major concert promoters that helps BMI's affiliated songwriters, composers and music publishers earn more royalties when their copyrighted songs are performed at live concerts. "It sends an important message that the live-performance industry should recognize the value of those who craft the music that artists perform," Miller says. (The case is under appeal.) The firm also advises SoundExchange, Universal Music, Sony Music and Warner Music, among others.
Advice about AI now "AI will likely transform important aspects of the industry, from how music is made and distributed to ownership and rights issues," Miller says. "It's crucial for songwriters, composers, music publishers, record labels and performing artists to understand, at a granular level, the streaming platforms, licensing frameworks and compliance mechanisms that protect their artistic works — especially if copyright protections are weakened by deregulation and new technologies."

Relentlessly invested in **our clients' success.**

Barnes & Thornburg congratulates its own Jason Karlov, Brian Schall and Amanda Taber on being named to Billboard's Top Music Lawyers.

Jason Karlov

Brian Schall

Amanda Taber

Barnes & Thornburg

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Last August, **TIMBALAND**’s independent label, Mosley Music, teamed with Universal Music Group Nashville, and in October, the producer announced a partnership with AI music creation tool Suno. Timbaland is represented by attorney Jeff Gandel.

AARON J. THORNTON/WIREIMAGE

Scott Edelman
PARTNER
Orin Snyder
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF TRIALS PRACTICE GROUP
GIBSON DUNN & CRUTCHER

Gibson Dunn & Crutcher has represented music industry powerhouses like Bob Dylan, Lady Gaga, Elton John and Mariah Carey over the years, as well as sports stars such as LeBron James. Other clients include nonmusic companies like AMC Networks and DraftKings — with the firm recently scoring a big win for the latter in a trade secret and noncompete lawsuit. Snyder also handles legal issues for OpenAI and other technology companies.

Charity I support “I am proud to serve on the board of directors of the David Lynch Foundation, which promotes Transcendental Meditation, particularly in at-risk communities,” Snyder says. “Having practiced TM for many years, I have seen firsthand its benefits in reducing stress, improving focus and fostering mental resilience.”

David C. Eisman
PARTNER/HEAD OF MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT GROUP
SKADDEN ARPS SLATE MEAGHER & FLOM

Last year, Eisman guided the $775 million sale of client Downtown Music Group to Virgin Music Group, the label and artists services division of Universal Music Group. The deal — expected to close in mid-2025 — will bring Downtown-owned CD Baby, FUGA and Songtrust to Virgin. Eisman also worked with Drake’s OVO Sound on the sale of a majority stake in the label’s catalog and artist roster to Sony Music’s Santa Anna Label Group in connection with a new partnership between the two labels. (The deal was followed by the chart-topping Billboard 200 debut in February of PartyNextDoor and Drake’s *$ome $exy $ongs 4 U* through OVO Sound, Republic and Santa Anna.) Other Eisman clients include Dreamville Records, gamma., S10 Management, LitMUS Music, Shady Records and Ntertain.

Most pressing issue “Ensuring artists, including emerging and independent talent, are fairly compensated across all platforms and media types.”

Tim Epstein
PARTNER
DUGGAN BERTSCH

As a top attorney in the independent festival space, Epstein stayed busy helping his clients navigate a tumultuous season. He advised La Familia Presents founders Chris Den Uijl and Aaron Ampudia as they formed Collectiv Presents alongside Hulaween founder Michael Berg to buy back the Florida festival from Etix’s Travis Janovich. Duggan Bertsch is also pursuing monies owed by secondary-ticketing platform Lyte, which shut down without warning in September. “I tried to right the ship and find a solution for the industry,” Epstein says of the situation that left many concert promoters unpaid for hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of tickets sold on the platform, “but no one wanted to bite because it was too toxic and worthless.”

Most pressing issue “Food and beverage sales are also down because Generation Z consumes less alcohol than millennials or older generations.”

Adam J. Farag
FOUNDER/OWNER
AJ FARAG LAW

Farag’s law firm is the choice team for high-profile clients including Doja Cat, Coco & Breezy, Blaq Tuxedo and Songfinch. He says he develops trust with those he works with because he appreciates the pressure of being an artist. “In this demanding landscape, prioritizing both mental and physical well-being is more important than ever,” he says. “A balanced approach — through healthy eating, regular exercise, therapy and mindful habits — can help artists navigate these pressures without unnecessary strain. By taking care of themselves, they can sustain their creativity and career longevity while maintaining their well-being.”

Advice about AI now “If there’s an aspect of your artistry where you need support or lack resources, AI can help fill in the gaps — whether it’s generating chord progressions for a melody or refining production elements,” Farag says. “However, be mindful of how AI-generated content impacts originality and ownership. The key is to use AI to enhance your creativity, not replace it.”

Matt Finkelstein
PARTNER/MUSIC PRACTICE LEADER
ARENTFOX SCHIFF

Finkelstein, with his former law partner Ross Charap (now at the firm Barton; see page 66), won a victory for clients Mick Jagger and Keith Richards and all songwriters and their heirs who exercise termination rights under U.S. copyright law. They successfully argued for the Copyright Office to revoke a rule of the Mechanical Licensing Collective that resulted in terminated publishers continuing to receive MLC royalties after their rights had been discontinued. Additionally, Finkelstein represented BMG in its acquisition of Paul Simon’s royalty income from Simon & Garfunkel recordings, as well as his neighboring rights income, representing a substantial stake in Simon’s work.

Advice about AI now “AI is here to stay. Decide whether you want to lead or follow the lead of others in its use. We encourage our clients, whether music companies, recording artists or songwriters, to learn how AI technologies can be harnessed for good and their potential pitfalls and risks.”

Sidney Fohrman
PARTNER OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA/CHAIR OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY PRACTICE
PAUL HASTINGS

Fohrman’s major transactions last year included work as outside music counsel to Create Music Group on more than 10 acquisitions, including deadmau5’s recording and publishing catalogs and label, and advising on CMG’s $165 million investment from Flexpoint Ford at a $1 billion valuation. Fohrman also represented BMG, HYBE America, ByteDance/TikTok and Primary Wave; for the lattermost, he worked on transactions such as acquisition and joint-venture partnership agreements with the Village People, including name, image and likeness rights. “The multifaceted deal will bring the Village People into the 21st century,” Fohrman says, “and to new audiences throughout the world in a variety of bold and innovative ways.”

Most pressing issue “Innovating economic models so that revenue sharing becomes more equitable. The status quo could result in the world missing out on the next Rihanna, Prince or U2. Heck, we may be now and don’t even know it.”

Congratulations to our 2025 TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

Allen Grubman
Larry Shire
Kenny Meiselas
Eric Sacks

Your guidance and inspiration have been instrumental to our teams' success!

Love from the entire GSMS family

GRUBMAN
SHIRE
MEISELAS &
SACKS
ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LAWYERS

John Frankenheimer
CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY/ CHAIRMAN EMERITUS

Derek Crownover
VICE CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY/CO-OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE PARTNER OF NASHVILLE

Debbie White
VICE CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY

Tiffany Dunn
CO-OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE PARTNER OF NASHVILLE

Kenneth Kraus
Monika Tashman
PARTNERS

LOEB & LOEB

Loeb & Loeb has guided numerous collaboration, venture, endorsement and sponsorship agreements with public and private companies for its clients, which include Big Loud Records, Warner Music Group, the Academy of Country Music, Sony Music Publishing, *American Idol*, Blondie, Luke Combs, Christina Aguilera, Diana Ross and Morgan Wallen. "We continue to represent both active buyers and sellers concerning a wide range of music [intellectual property] across all platforms and genres — approximately $700 million in the past year alone," Frankenheimer says, noting the firm is also helping develop projects for its clients that range from film and TV to sports and books.

Advice about AI now "Be very careful in every agreement that you enter into regarding the rights you are conveying and how they are monetized to ensure that you fully comprehend what is and is not permissible," Frankenheimer says. "AI is evolving at unprecedented speed, and there will be continuing tension between those that grant rights and those that obtain them."

Kenneth D. Freundlich
FOUNDING PRINCIPAL

FREUNDLICH LAW

Freundlich Law secured a temporary restraining order against Breakbeat Media for comedian Funny Marco that prevented the podcast network from issuing false takedown notices. The firm's strategic defense of Bad Bunny in the dembow litigation effectively bifurcated the issue of "originality and protectability" to streamline legal processes and cut costs, according to Freundlich; he also represented Walter Afanasieff, a writer and producer of Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You," in a copyright infringement case. "We moved for summary judgment and sanctions against the plaintiff and their firm," Freundlich says, "and the decision is currently pending."

Charity I support "Harmony Project. This is an L.A.-based charity that puts instruments into the hands of underprivileged youth and provides lessons and groups to play in and venues for live concerts."

The firm of Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks handled the legal work behind **LADY GAGA**'s new album, *MAYHEM*.

JOHN SHEARER/GETTY IMAGES

Jeffrey B. Gandel
FOUNDER

THE LAW OFFICE OF JEFFREY B. GANDEL

With clients including Timbaland and DJs such as ACRAZE, REZZ and GORDO, among other songwriters, producers and musicians, Gandel describes the music industry as "fun." In August, Timbaland's independent label, Mosley Music, teamed with Universal Music Group Nashville, and in October, the iconic producer announced a partnership with AI music creation tool Suno. "In this day and age as everyone is talking about AI," Gandel says, "the most important thing is for each of my clients to understand what it is and how it interacts with their work."

Charity I support "The Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. Both of my children were diagnosed with Crohn's disease. My son passed away from complications from that disease about six years ago. I am raising money to help find a cure so that no one has to go through that loss, and what my other kid goes through, to keep the disease in check."

Eric German
Christine Lepera
Bradley Mullins
David Steinberg
PARTNERS

MITCHELL SILBERBERG & KNUPP

Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp represents Dua Lipa, Drake, Daryl Hall, Post Malone, Kobalt and others, boasting one of the industry's top litigation teams for artists, songwriters and music companies facing copyright lawsuits. Case in point: In 2023, it won the dismissal of a high-profile infringement case against Lipa over her smash hit "Levitating" and, in 2024, it helped Universal Music Group beat a copyright lawsuit over the song "Glow" by Drake and Ye. Kobalt Music Publishing also retained the firm for representation in a copyright infringement case involving Eminem's publisher, Eight Mile Style, and Spotify in connection with ongoing litigation and appeals.

Most pressing issue "In connection with advocacy efforts for creators," the most pressing issues with this new administration, Lepera says, are the ones "regarding secondary ticketing/concert pricing."

Damien Granderson
PARTNER

Guy Blake
MANAGING PARTNER

Lynn Gonzalez
Elizabeth Moody
Colin Morrissey
PARTNERS

GRANDERSON DES ROCHERS

Granderson Des Rochers made significant strides with its impressive roster of clients, which includes A$AP Rocky, J. Balvin, Ne-Yo, Wizkid, Snoh Aalegra and Queen Naija. The firm secured Coachella 2024 performance agreements for Balvin and Sid Sriram and played a vital role in constructing RAYE's performance agreements for the 2025 Grammy and Academy Awards. It was also instrumental in A$AP Rocky's partnerships with Ray-Ban — where he became the eyewear company's first creative director — and Puma Formula, and facilitated the deal between Antonio "L.A." Reid and Usher's Mega label and Larry Jackson's gamma.

Advice about AI now "Always be aware of where your music is," Granderson says, "and be apprised of unauthorized uses of your songs, voice and likeness, including in training materials."

Matthew Greenberg
MANAGING PARTNER

Stephanie Chopurian-Valencia
PARTNER

GREENBERG CHOPURIAN-VALENCIA & ASSOCIATES

Greenberg and Chopurian-Valencia's client list is a who's who of Latin music that includes Farruko, Arcangel, Gerardo Ortiz and Prince Royce, as well as labels Big Ligas and Emporio Records. In the past year, the firm negotiated catalog sales for artists and songwriters exceeding $40 million, including securing the worldwide recording and publishing rights for the father of late Venezuelan rapper Canserbero; negotiating joint venture and publishing administration agreements for Ovy on the Drums, Yandel and Sech; and developing motion picture and streaming series for several music-related properties. The practice also negotiated sponsorship or endorsement deals for its artist clients with consumer brands including Heineken and Stella Rosa.

Advice about AI now "Alert your label or distributor whenever you find unauthorized AI and press them to resolve," Greenberg says.

Congratulations to
Jeff Gould,
Alex Kaplan,
Matt Oppenheim,
and Scott Zebrak

for being named to Billboard's
Top Music Lawyers list

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+ Zebrak, LLP

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Craig Marshall
Tamara Milagros-Butler
Robert Minzner
PARTNERS
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The firm's clients include both major artists — Ariana Grande, Big Sean, Common, Dead & Company, Erykah Badu, Jennifer Lopez, John Legend, Khruangbin, Meghan Trainor, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Tate McRae, Deftones and Troye Sivan — and leading executives such as Aaron Bay-Schuck, Ben Adelson, Katie Welle, Tunji Balogun, Tyler Arnold and Wendy Goldstein. "Over the past year, our firm has had the privilege of guiding several landmark moments," Rosenberg says, "but two stand out: Ariana Grande's seamless transition from global pop icon with *Eternal Sunshine* to her Oscar-nominated turn in *Wicked* and Dead & Company's historic residency at Sphere in Las Vegas. These deals showcase the intricate and evolving nature of artistry and the legal and strategic paths that make them possible."

Most pressing issue "Pay equity for songwriters," Rosenberg says. "All popular music begins and ends with the song, and we have not been taking care of creators in the way that we should. That needs to change."

Gary R. Greenstein
MEMBER
WILSON SONSINI GOODRICH & ROSATI

In 2024, Greenstein, who helms technology transactions at his firm in Washington, D.C., represented Marriott International after Sony Music Entertainment sued the hotel company for copyright infringement. SME alleged that Marriott and its influencer partners misused over 900 Sony songs from artists including Beyoncé, Harry Styles and Michael Jackson in advertising on social media platforms. In October, the music company dropped the case, and both entities ended the litigation with prejudice so it could not be refiled. Major music companies are an ongoing concern for Greenstein, who says, "The concentration of power among a handful of major licensors is limiting innovation and requiring enormous table stakes to enter the marketplace."

Charity I support "Human Rights Campaign as a defender of the rights of the transgender community. I am a parent to two transgender 21-year-olds."

Allen Grubman
FOUNDING PARTNER
Lawrence Shire
HEAD OF MOTION PICTURE, TV, THEATER, PUBLISHING, NEW MEDIA AND SPORTS
Kenny Meiselas
NAMED PARTNER/HEAD OF THE MUSIC DEPARTMENT
Eric Sacks
NAMED PARTNER/HEAD OF THE CORPORATE DEPARTMENT
GRUBMAN SHIRE MEISELAS & SACKS

The high-powered firm led by Rock & Roll Hall of Fame founder and inductee Grubman spent the last year and a half working on deals for music's biggest stars, including the upcoming Bruce Springsteen biopic *Deliver Me From Nowhere* starring Jeremy Allen White and Lady Gaga's new album, *MAYHEM*. The firm also represented Usher for his 2024 Super Bowl halftime show performance and endorsement deals with Ralph Lauren, BMW and Uber Eats, as well as The Weeknd for his latest album, the Billboard 200 No. 1 *Hurry Up Tomorrow*, and upcoming film of the same name. Plus, Sacks' department handles acquisitions by Live Nation, Sony Music, HYBE America and iHeartMedia, in addition to representing Atlantic CEO Elliot Grainge in transactions related to his 10K Projects' venture with Warner Music Group.

Most pressing issue "To develop the next generation of superstar artists and executives," Meiselas says.

Michael Frisch of Herbsman Hafer Weber & Frisch negotiated the music rights from labels for all of **GARLAND JEFFREYS**' music for the award-winning documentary *Garland Jeffreys: The King of In Between*, which portrays the underrecognized artist whom Bruce Springsteen called "one of the American greats."

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES

Jordan Gutglass
Evan Krauss
Daniel Shulman
Owen Sloane
PARTNERS
EISNER

Eisner represented Jon Batiste in the deal for the Grammy- and Academy Award-winning artist's first Jon Batiste Jazz Club, a 278-seat venue that opened in January at luxury resort Baha Mar in Nassau, Bahamas. Gutglass cites that deal, which allowed Eisner to "leverage several practice areas," as a recent highlight for the firm. Eisner's clients also include PartyNextDoor, the Aaliyah estate, Leon Thomas, KATSEYE, Sofi Tukker, Boi-1da, Hype Williams, Matchbox Twenty and Ceremony of Roses.

Charity I support "Music's Promise encourages and empowers artists, music companies and executives to use their influence to support causes that are important to them," Gutglass says. "Founded during the pandemic in 2020, Music's Promise recognized the unique position that the music industry had to create exciting ways to give back to its communities."

Pierre Hachar
FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER
Cody Pellicer
GENERAL PARTNER
THE HACHAR LAW GROUP

"We successfully structured and closed a worldwide licensing agreement with Island Records and a publishing administration deal with Sony Publishing for Gigi Perez following the meteoric success of her hit 'Sailor Song,' which reached No. 1 in the U.K. and charted globally," Hachar says of his firm's recent successes. The law group also represented Carín León in his landmark global partnership with Virgin Music Group and Island Records, which bolstered the musician internationally, and works with Carlos Rivera, Justin Quiles, Alejandra Guzmán, Chayanne, the Celia Cruz estate and HYBE Latin America, among others.

Most pressing issue "Building careers rather than songs," Hachar says. "With so much emphasis on virality, the industry is too focused on finding the hit rather than building the artist."

Joe Halbardier
OWNER
HALBARDIER

In 2024, Halbardier closed deals worth over $150 million for its clients, who range from T-Pain to Surfaces and Grupo Frontera, according to the firm. "Highlights include advising T-Pain on the sale of a portion of his assets to HarbourView Equity Partners and Forrest Frank's breakout year as a solo artist," Halbardier says. While his clients continue to succeed, he points to ticket pricing as an ongoing "frustration" for artists, their fans and the promoters. "Artists want sellouts, fans want reasonable and transparent pricing and the promoters want to maximize their profits," Halbardier says. "If ticket sales have softened but promoters' profits have reached new levels, something isn't right."

Advice about AI now "We obviously have to protect our clients' creative works and copyrights, which so far the industry is doing a decent job of. The last thing we want is a flood of machine-made music flooding the market, so having strong guardrails in place is of utmost importance."

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Congratulations

Greenberg Traurig proudly congratulates our colleagues—*Jeff Biederman, Jay Cooper, Jonathan Koby, Steve Plinio, Jess Rosen, Bobby Rosenbloum, Paul Schindler, and Charmaine Smith*—on being named to the **Billboard 2025 Top Music Lawyers** list.

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David L. Hecht
MANAGING PARTNER

HECHT PARTNERS

Hecht was lead counsel for choreographer Kyle Hanagami in a landmark copyright infringement case against Epic Games. A federal appeals court issued a first-of-its-kind ruling on copyright protections for dance routines in favor of the celebrity choreographer who has worked with BTS, Jennifer Lopez, Justin Bieber and Britney Spears. The firm won "an appeal in the Ninth Circuit that redefined the limits of protection for choreography in the era of 'short form' media and resulted in new law being established in the field," Hecht says. Hanagami ended the case in 2024 after reaching an out-of-court agreement with Epic Games.

Most pressing issue "The lack of diversity and inclusion in some parts of the industry, particularly in positions of power and decision-making. Women, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals still face significant barriers to equality in terms of recognition, opportunities and treatment within the industry."

Jonas Herbsman
MANAGING PARTNER

Dorothy Weber
Michael Frisch
PARTNERS

HERBSMAN HAFER WEBER & FRISCH

Herbsman and partners — who represent clients including the Blue Note jazz clubs, Lenny Kravitz, Patti LaBelle, Judy Collins, Alice Coltrane, Foreigner, Art Garfunkel, Yoko Ono and the estates of John Lennon and Roberta Flack — worked "extensively" on the critically acclaimed 50th-anniversary box set of Lennon's 1973 album, *Mind Games*, which arrived last July and, earlier this year, won the Grammy for best boxed or special limited-edition packaging. Frisch negotiated the music rights from labels for all of Garland Jeffreys' music for the documentary *Garland Jeffreys: The King of In Between*.

Charity I support "I support Why Hunger, a charity founded by the late [musician] Harry Chapin and radio DJ Bill Ayres," Herbsman says. "I believe in their mission to end hunger by providing long-term solutions and helping communities address the root causes of hunger at a grassroots level."

Ken Hertz
FOUNDING PARTNER

Jamie Young
Ed Bugge
PARTNERS

HERTZ LICHTENSTEIN YOUNG & POLK

Hertz Lichtenstein Young & Polk's roster ranges from Apple Music, Céline Dion and Gwen Stefani to Herbie Hancock, H.E.R. and Stevie Nicks. While the firm declines to disclose specific deals, Hertz and Young explain that they are maintaining a close eye on the various unresolved copyright issues related to the exponential acceleration of AI platforms, for they believe the technology is here to stay and should be embraced with caution. "The U.K.'s model to make licenses for data mining more available is the likely trend," Young says. "But, on the flip side, the rise of AI should create greater value in live experiences and support continued growth in the concert touring business."

Charity we support "In addition to directly supporting first responders and those affected by the wildfires, we strongly support the ACLU," Young says. "The work of the ACLU in the defense of constitutional rights has never been more important than today. Unfortunately, the Constitution's amendments cannot defend themselves."

Larry Iser
MANAGING PARTNER

Jon Steinsapir
PARTNER

KINSELLA HOLLEY ISER KUMP STEINSAPIR

The longtime attorneys for Michael Jackson's estate scored a California appellate court victory in August after what Iser calls a "contentious dispute" with the late King of Pop's mother, Katherine Jackson. She had argued that the sale of half of Jackson's $1.2 billion catalog to Sony contradicted his will, which established a trust naming her and his children beneficiaries. The court determined that the will gave the executors "broad power of sale" and that they did not violate the contract when they struck the deal with Sony to purchase half of the catalog for more than $600 million. The firm also represents Jackson Browne, Sofi Tukker, Del Records, Signature Tracks, the *Ron Miller Songbook*, Roland, Spectrasonics and Third Side Music, among others.

The music industry today in a word "Algorithms," Iser says.

Erin M. Jacobson
FOUNDER/OWNER

ERIN M. JACOBSON

As founder and owner of her own boutique music law firm, Jacobson says she handles legal matters for a slate of artists that include "Oscar-, Emmy-, Golden Globe- and Grammy-winning songwriters" and "songwriters and/or artists of many *Billboard* No. 1 and top 10 hits," as well as "evergreen catalogs, iconic TV theme songs, celebrated holiday classics, a variety of 1950s and 1960s artists and other eminent songwriters." Recently, she has worked on complicated copyright termination projects for hit songs and a variety of sophisticated legacy and estate catalog issues. Though she does not disclose client names, she has negotiated "for large, multimillion-dollar catalog acquisitions, including acquisitions of writer's shares."

Most pressing issue "Unfortunately, the overall issue of fair payment for creators persists."

Douglas L. Johnson
MANAGING PARTNER

Neville L. Johnson
SENIOR PARTNER

JOHNSON & JOHNSON

Johnson & Johnson recently settled a class action against Comedy Central for $11 million on behalf of artists who had been shortchanged millions of their SiriusXM royalties, according to the firm. It's also serving as lead counsel in a lawsuit filed by client Kobalt Music Publishing and other music companies against 14 NBA teams, alleging the basketball teams used songs by Migos, Britney Spears, Cardi B, Jay-Z, Outkast, Justin Bieber, Meek Mill, Wiz Khalifa, Lizzo, DJ Khaled, John Legend and others in social media clips without permission, with 14 separate actions filed in federal court in New York.

Charity we support "World Vision because they support kids who live in poverty," Douglas says, "and 87% of every dollar donated goes directly to the children or families in need."

Rusty Jones
ATTORNEY

LAW OFFICE OF RUSSELL A. JONES JR. AND ASSOCIATES

Jones represents an array of artists including Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Tim McGraw and the estate of Country Music Hall of Famer Toby Keith, who died in 2024 from stomach cancer. Over the past year, Jones worked on the legal aspects involved in bringing the NBC TV special *Toby Keith: American Icon* to music fans. The two-hour program, which aired in August and featured artists such as Jelly Roll, Carrie Underwood, Lainey Wilson and Darius Rucker paying tribute to Keith, drew 4.7 million viewers, according to Nielsen. When it comes to AI, Jones advises: "Watch out. It's too early to see where this is going."

Most pressing issue "Consolidation. Labels, publishing. It's big guys gobbling up big guys right now."

The Nashville firm of Russell A. Jones Jr. and Associates represents the estate of **TOBY KEITH** and worked on the legal aspects involved in bringing the NBC TV special *Toby Keith: American Icon* to music fans.

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

We are proud to congratulate our 2025 Billboard Top Music Lawyers

Ken Abdo

Paul Bowles

Cynthia Katz

Tim Mandelbaum

Michael Reinert

Leron Rogers

Alex Threadgold

Heidy Vaquerano

With thanks to our clients and acknowledging our Music Law colleagues who helped make this honor possible:

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Joshua Edwards (Los Angeles)
Alan Friedman (New York)
Darrell Miller (Los Angeles)
Paul Bezilla (Minneapolis)
Joshua Bornstein (Los Angeles)
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Mark Music & Media Law negotiated a deal with Pepsi for rapper **ICE SPICE** to appear in the brand's latest Super Bowl commercial.

THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES

Joshua A. Kamen

FOUNDER/OWNER

THE LAW OFFICES OF JOSHUA A. KAMEN

Kamen negotiated Teddy Swims' lucrative publishing administration deal with Warner Chappell Music following the success of his breakout hit, "Lose Control," which ruled the Hot 100 and was named the top Hot 100 song and top radio song at the 2024 Billboard Music Awards. Kamen even played the role of A&R executive when liaising between Teddy Swims and Giveon for their song, "Are You Even Real." In addition to that pair of artists, Kamen represents talent including 6LACK, JT, Yung Miami, OZ and Cubeatz.

Most pressing issue "Too many clearances, not enough lawyers. It feels like nearly every song these days has at least six writers and producers. And more often than not, these collaborators weren't in the room creating the song together and may not even know each other."

Jason Karlov

PARTNER/ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA AND SPORTS PRACTICE GROUP CHAIR

Brian Schall
Amanda Taber

PARTNERS

BARNES & THORNBURG

Barnes & Thornburg represents clientele including Bob Dylan, John Fogerty, T Bone Burnett, the NFL and the Grateful Dead's publishing company, Ice Nine. The firm also handled legal matters for the upcoming Bob Marley exhibit, "Hope Road," that is slated to open later this year at Las Vegas' Mandalay Bay and will offer fans an immersive experience celebrating the reggae legend's life and music.

Advice about AI now "Take a wait-and-see approach if you can afford to do so, but if you can't wait, then strike while things are hot for the shortest term possible, the most money and preserve your future rights including post-term reversion rights," Karlov says. "How AI plays out will continue to evolve like many technologies we have seen historically in the music business."

Priyanka Khimani

FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER

KHIMANI & ASSOCIATES

Based in Mumbai, India, Khimani advises companies such as Reservoir, Snap, Songtrader and GoldState Music, and artists including Academy Award-winning composer A.R. Rahman; Canada's AP Dhillon, the first rapper of Indian origin signed to Republic Records; and Indian singer-songwriter Jasleen Royal, who opened for Coldplay in India. Among her recent achievements: "We advised and represented 13 leading independent artists and singer-songwriters in India, including Anuv Jain, on a strategic, first-of-its-kind partnership with Universal Music India."

Most pressing issue "We need an overhaul of the publishing and collection society ecosystem. [Performing rights organizations] were set up much before a thriving, fast-paced digital streaming era existed. Territorywise, negotiations or piecemeal clearance of rights ends up being needlessly time-consuming and expensive."

Howard King
Peter Paterno
Laurie Soriano
Joseph Carlone
Leslie Frank
Marjorie Garcia
Scott McDowell
Michael Rexford
Jacqueline Sabec

PARTNERS

KING HOLMES PATERNO & SORIANO

Client Tyler, The Creator had a busy 2024. The artist's eighth album, *Chromakopia*, ruled the Billboard 200 for three weeks, marking his third No. 1 on the chart. Beyond his recorded-music success, King notes the firm "negotiated and papered all transactions" for Tyler, including merchandise and video-game deals, his Golf Le Fleur fashion line, 2025 world tour and festival Camp Flog Gnaw Carnival, which celebrated its 10th edition in 2024. The company also represents Dr. Dre, Metallica, Nicole Scherzinger, Twenty One Pilots, Van Morrison, Alanis Morissette, Sia, Frank Ocean, Ms. Lauryn Hill, Carole King, blink-182 and the estate of Tupac Shakur.

Charity we support "Metallica's All Within My Hands Foundation," Paterno says, "because Metallica is a very longtime and beloved client of ours and we fully believe in their foundation's laudable work in supporting workforce education, the fight against hunger and other critical civic issues."

Russell L. King

DIRECTOR

KING LAW FIRM

King says that he provides "the tools that my non-U.S. clients need for live performances, from tax efficiency through prospective agreements with the IRS, help with visas and [navigating] sponsorship and endorsement deals." With a client list that includes Maluma, Juan Luis Guerra, Emilia, Quevedo, Melendi and Andrés Cepeda, he has had no shortage of international travel to follow. Maluma's 2025 +Pretty +Dirty tour dates span several continents, and Argentine artist Emilia has increased her time spent in the United States as part of her effort to globally expand.

Most pressing issue "There has been a rise in lawsuits that allege that certain fundamental components and building blocks of music are in fact protected intellectual property. This has a stifling effect on creativity and needlessly bogs down musicians in energy-sapping litigation."

Christiane Kinney

PRESIDENT

KINNEY LAW

As an attorney specializing in copyright and intellectual property law, Kinney has spent the last year and a half ensuring "our clients retain control over their works, as well as their name, image, unique vocal features and likeness, building in strong contractual protections against the use of AI and fighting back against deepfakes and other technological abuses." Although Kinney declines to reveal her firm's client list, she says that handling "music catalog sales, termination of transfer rights and negotiating deals and partnerships with companies and brands who have a forward-thinking mindset that values artists" are among her recent achievements.

Charity I support "I co-founded a nonprofit organization called Hearts Giving Hope Foundation in 2002, which is dedicated to improving the lives of abused and underprivileged children by providing them with positive outlets of self-expression and growth through music and visual arts."

Mark Krais
Simon Goodbody

PARTNERS

BRAY & KRAIS

Krais and Goodbody, who represent such iconic British acts as The Rolling Stones and Elton John along with younger ones like Skepta, Ed Sheeran and Mumford & Sons, have been involved in one of the live sector's biggest recent stories: the Oasis reunion tour, which is set to play more than 40 dates across four continents when it begins later this year. The two lawyers negotiated the necessary paperwork and agreements for the band's notoriously at-odds Gallagher brothers, paving the way for their first shows together since 2009.

Advice about AI now "Get involved," Goodbody says. "The voices of artists and creators are crucial for the debate as we try and navigate what we want the future of AI — and music — to look like and what limits we should place on it."

2025

billboard

TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

Skip Miller

Sasha Frid

MILLER BARONDESS, LLP

LITIGATORS | TRIAL LAWYERS

MILLERBARONDESS.COM

Dina LaPolt
FOUNDER
Lindsay Arrington
Dominic Chaklos
Mariah Comer
PARTNERS
LAPOLT LAW

LaPolt expanded her reach this year with the launch of LaPolt Media, a company focused on content production, but the powerhouse attorney says that her firm remains her "first passion and first priority." Though LaPolt Law declines to cite specific cases for confidentiality reasons, its clients include Cardi B, 21 Savage, deadmau5, Steven Tyler, Mary J. Blige and Tinashe. "Our firm continues to be at the forefront of major industry negotiations, policy advocacy and high-profile legal matters that shape the future of music and artists' rights," LaPolt says.

Most pressing issue "The further consolidation of the music business and the political massacre" of diversity, equity and inclusion, LaPolt says. "As companies scale back or eliminate [DEI] initiatives, we're seeing a disproportionate impact on women and people of color — many of whom are the first to be laid off."

Shay M. Lawson
MANAGING ATTORNEY
LAW FIRM OF LAWSON McKINLEY

Lawson McKinley remains a choice firm among R&B and hip-hop artists, representing clients ranging from Offset and Xscape to producers Henny Tha Bizness (Kendrick Lamar, Jeezy, Chris Brown) and Groove (Mustard, Smino, Anwar Carrots). The team oversaw the legal aspects of Xscape's co-headlining Queens of R&B Tour with SWV, which featured special guests MYA, 702 and Total. Despite the tour's success, Lawson points to "the harm to consumers and artists from ticketing bots and inflated secondary-market prices" as a major issue facing the music industry.

Advice about AI now "AI has as many opportunities as it does challenges. Go take advantage of the exciting opportunities. Let the lawyers handle the challenges."

Bill Leibowitz
FOUNDER/PARTNER
WILLIAM R. LEIBOWITZ LAW GROUP

The Leibowitz Law Group assisted in the transactions that resulted in the publicly held Hipgnosis Songs Fund going private. "Since I had represented the public Hipgnosis company in the negotiation and drafting of almost all of its intellectual property acquisition agreements, I had intimate knowledge of the agreements and the background and dynamics of their negotiation," Leibowitz says. Blackstone completed its $1.6 billion acquisition of Hipgnosis in July. The firm's other notable clients include rock bands INXS, Iron Maiden and Of Mice & Men, as well as Global Merchandising Services.

Most pressing issue "For recording artists, it will be achieving success — either by virtue of victories in the federal courts or by amendment of current copyright statutes — that will establish their right to terminate a record company's ownership of U.S. rights in the artists' master recordings pursuant to Section 203 of the U.S. Copyright Act."

Kent Marcus
OWNER/PARTNER
MARCUS & COLVIN

Marcus represents Lainey Wilson, whose recent accolades include the 2024 Academy of Country Music Awards for entertainer of the year and female artist of the year, the 2024 Country Music Association Award for female vocalist of the year and the 2024 Grammy for best country album. His client roster also boasts Kings of Leon and Charley Crockett, while his partner, Jeff Colvin, represents 2024 best new artist Grammy nominees Noah Kahan and The War and Treaty. Colvin played "an integral part of renegotiating Kahan's recording agreement with Republic Records," says Marcus, who also counseled Kings of Leon when the band transitioned to Capitol Records and Crockett as he signed his first major-label deal with Island Records.

Charity we support "The Busyhead Project, a mental health initiative founded by Noah Kahan, and the Out of the Woods Foundation, founded by Jeff Colvin and his wife to fund the recovery and rehabilitation of children who have sustained brain and spinal cord injuries."

Doug Mark
FOUNDING PARTNER
David Ferreria
Leon Morabia
Harry Roberts
Jared Tankel
PARTNERS
MARK MUSIC & MEDIA LAW

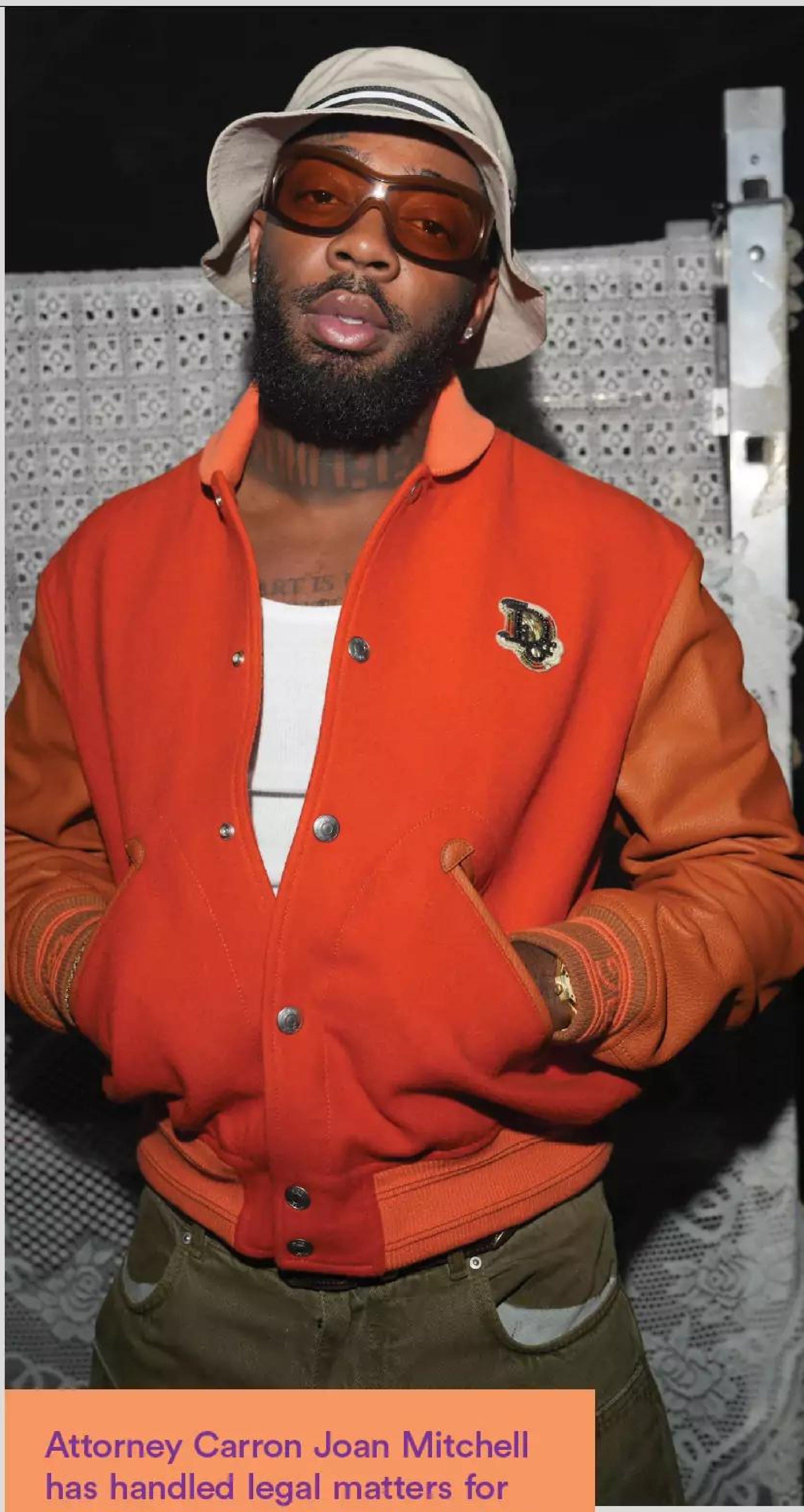
Mark Music & Media Law has recently helped several clients leverage music stardom into lucrative opportunities outside of the industry. Morabia cites three examples of the firm's negotiating prowess: a deal with Pepsi for rapper Ice Spice to appear in the brand's latest Super Bowl commercial; a contract with Harper Collins for Benny Blanco's cookbook, which entered *The New York Times'* bestsellers list; and the agreements for the production and theatrical release of Laufey's *A Night at the Symphony: Live at the Hollywood Bowl*. The firm also represents Amy Allen, Guns N' Roses and The Chainsmokers, among others.

Advice about AI now "Great music has a unique, intangible quality that no algorithm can replicate," Morabia says, "and that authenticity will always cut through the noise."

Benjamin Marks
PARTNER/HEAD OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND MEDIA PRACTICE
Todd Larson
PARTNER, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND MEDIA PRACTICE
WEIL GOTSHAL & MANGES

Lined up against SoundExchange and the major labels, Weil Gotshal & Manges represents SiriusXM and Pandora in the Copyright Royalty Board's Web VI proceeding, which will set statutory noninteractive streaming rates for the next five years with hundreds of millions of dollars in royalties at stake. Larson and Marks also work with Meta, Spotify, TuneCore, the North American Concert Promoters Association and more as clients. Larson adds that "how to promote competitive markets and competitive-market outcomes for licensing music rights from record companies, music publishers and their respective collecting societies" is a major issue facing the industry, the result "of which is stifling growth and innovation throughout the music ecosystem."

Advice about AI now "Unfortunately, it's still wait and see," Larson says, "but as courts start deciding the fair-use questions at the root of the many pending cases, the legal picture will clear up significantly."



Attorney Carron Joan Mitchell has handled legal matters for **BRENT FAIYAZ**, including the launch of his creative agency, ISO Supremacy.

ALENA ZAKIROVA/GETTY IMAGES

Gavin Maude
PARTNER/HEAD OF MUSIC
Chris Gossage
Simon Jordan
Ryan Vince
PARTNERS
RUSSELLS

Russells represents leading companies including Universal Music Group, Sony Music Publishing, Warner Chappell Music and Primary Wave; top artists such as The Weeknd, Roger Waters and Lana Del Rey; and four of the five 2025 BRIT Awards best new artist nominees. In the past year, the firm's business included advising Coldplay on its *Music of the Spheres* tour, which set a record in January for the largest stadium shows of the 21st century with two concerts in India. It also worked with Sony Music Publishing on the acquisition of Tame Impala's catalog.

Most pressing issue "Unpredictable financial markets, inflation rates and a significant increase in red tape in crossing borders in mainland Europe have led to persistent increases in the costs of global touring," Jordan says. "Coupled with the fact that fans are saving their money to go to fewer but [more expensive] events, it is harder and harder for artists to tour."

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TOP MUSIC LAWYERS

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Ed McPherson
PARTNER
McPHERSON

With more than 40 years of experience, McPherson has built a notable client list that includes Kelly Clarkson, Travis Scott, Linkin Park, Justin Timberlake, Tool and Bret Michaels. Most recently, McPherson has worked to protect his clients from their own managers. “We continue to be vigilant about protecting artists’ rights against managers that blatantly violate the Talent Agencies Act, seeking commissions for entire tours that they unlawfully procure or seeking commissions in perpetuity,” he says. The managers keep filing de novos, a challenge of an arbitration award or a previous court’s decision, after the artist prevails at the California Labor Commission, “only to get the same result in [the state] Superior Court.”

Charities I support “Planned Parenthood, because they do good, essential work for people that really need them. Wounded Warriors, because they do good, essential work for people that really need them.”

Louis “Skip” Miller
Sasha Frid
PARTNERS
MILLER BARONDESS

Miller Barondess represents Mötley Crüe, Logic, Azealia Banks, Gavin Rossdale and Big Time Rush, and Frid cites recent court victories including securing a confidential settlement for business manager Thomas St. John against Ye for breach of a business management agreement. The firm also won a federal jury defense verdict while representing William “Smokey” Robinson, whose former manager had sued the Motown legend for breach of contract and alleged commissions due from the artist’s concerts and tours. Also in the win column: another verdict in favor of music technology firm Virtual Sonics against former investors seeking millions of dollars.

Most pressing issue “Marketing, promotion and artist development,” Frid says. “Getting your label and manager to put you on the right track.”

Mike Milom
David Crow
MEMBERS
MILOM CROW KELLEY BECKETT SHEHAN

The company represents an array of clients such as Kelsea Ballerini, Luke Bryan, Scotty McCreery, Carly Pearce, Emmylou Harris, Alabama, Lindsay Ell, Ricky Skaggs and Keith Urban. Milom Crow Kelley Beckett Shehan still represents both buyers and sellers in catalog sales, as well as in new artist signings and joint ventures, in addition to sponsorship and endorsement activities as the firm’s clients team with various brands. With labels “no longer performing many of the traditional artist-development activities as they have in the past,” Milom says the responsibility has fallen to publishers and managers. “This, in turn,” he adds, “has impacted deal structures, and newer deals often won’t support labels sticking with a new artist for multiple releases.”

The music industry today in a word “Recalibrating,” Milom says.

Carron Joan Mitchell
Farrah Usmani
PARTNERS
NIXON PEABODY

Mitchell and Usmani had their hands full in 2024. Mitchell handled all legal matters for breakout R&B star Brent Faiyaz, including the launch of his creative agency, ISO Supremacy, and Vince Staples relied on him for business such as the release of his final album with Def Jam, *Dark Times*, and his Netflix series, *The Vince Staples Show*, which was picked up for a second season. Usmani addresses all business affairs for Russian group Pussy Riot in North America and attended to legal needs for Rainbow Kitten Surprise, including the renegotiation of the band’s publishing partnership with Kobalt Music.

Charity I support “Girls Write Nashville is a 501(c)(3) that provides after-school music education to kids in the Nashville metro area,” Usmani says. “I support them because they empower young songwriters to find their voice, build confidence and express themselves through music in a supportive community.”

Gang Tyre Ramer Brown & Passman oversaw **RANDY NEWMAN**’s sale in October of his share of his recorded-music and publishing rights to Litmus Music.

TIM MOSENFELDER/WIREIMAGE

Zia Modabber
MANAGING PARTNER OF THE CALIFORNIA OFFICES/
CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LITIGATION
KATTEN

Modabber’s clients include Live Nation, the Michael Jackson estate, André 3000, Stevie Wonder and Trent Reznor, whom Modabber represents “across all of his projects,” including Nine Inch Nails and its 2025 tour and Reznor’s acclaimed and award-winning film and TV score work. In January, Reznor and Atticus Ross won their third Golden Globe for best original score for the film *Challengers*, while Nine Inch Nails is scoring the upcoming Disney film *TRON: Ares*. “Our work also includes [Reznor’s] nascent production company, With Teeth,” Modabber adds.

Advice about AI now “Know your rights when it comes to right of publicity and name/image/likeness. There are new laws in California, Tennessee and elsewhere regarding right of publicity, unauthorized digital replicas and deepfakes and AI.”

Jeffrey Movit
PARTNER/HEAD OF LITIGATION
CHAUDHRYLAW

In January, Movit’s clients Artist Partner Group, Artist Publishing Group and Release Global launched a copyright infringement action against Create Music Group and its affiliates, accusing the company of uploading and monetizing songs without holding the proper ownership rights. Additionally, the suit alleges that CMG has interfered with artists’ established contracts. “Our complaint demonstrates that APG will aggressively protect its contracts and copyrights,” Movit said in a statement at the time. (CMG has disputed the claims.) Other clients include Ronald Isley, Dr. Luke, Polo G, Ultra International Music Publishing and Playboi Carti, whose album *MUSIC* earned 30 simultaneous entries on the Hot 100 and debuted atop the Billboard 200 in March.

Advice about AI now “Keep up with the latest developments because the landscape is constantly shifting.”

Andrew Myers
PRINCIPAL/CEO
Peter Button
Berkeley Edwards
Alastair Kenwood
Nicky Stein
Victoria Wood
PRINCIPALS
CLINTONS

As Charli xcx romped through 2024 — earning six Hot 100 hits from her *brat* album and remix sequel *brat and it’s completely different but also still brat* that featured collaborations with Robyn, Lorde, Kesha and Sweat tourmate Troye Sivan, among others — Clintons was “intricately involved in the negotiation and structuring of all of the global branding and sponsorship deals” that accompanied the album, according to Edwards. Charli is just one of the firm’s high-flying clients, who also include Chappell Roan, The Who, The Cure, The Jam’s Paul Weller, Radiohead, The 1975, Daft Punk, Fred again.., Lewis Capaldi, Stereophonics and Barry Can’t Swim.

Charity we support “As a firm, we support different charities each year,” Edwards says. “I personally am a trustee for the National Foundation of Youth Music, which supports music education in disadvantaged communities.”

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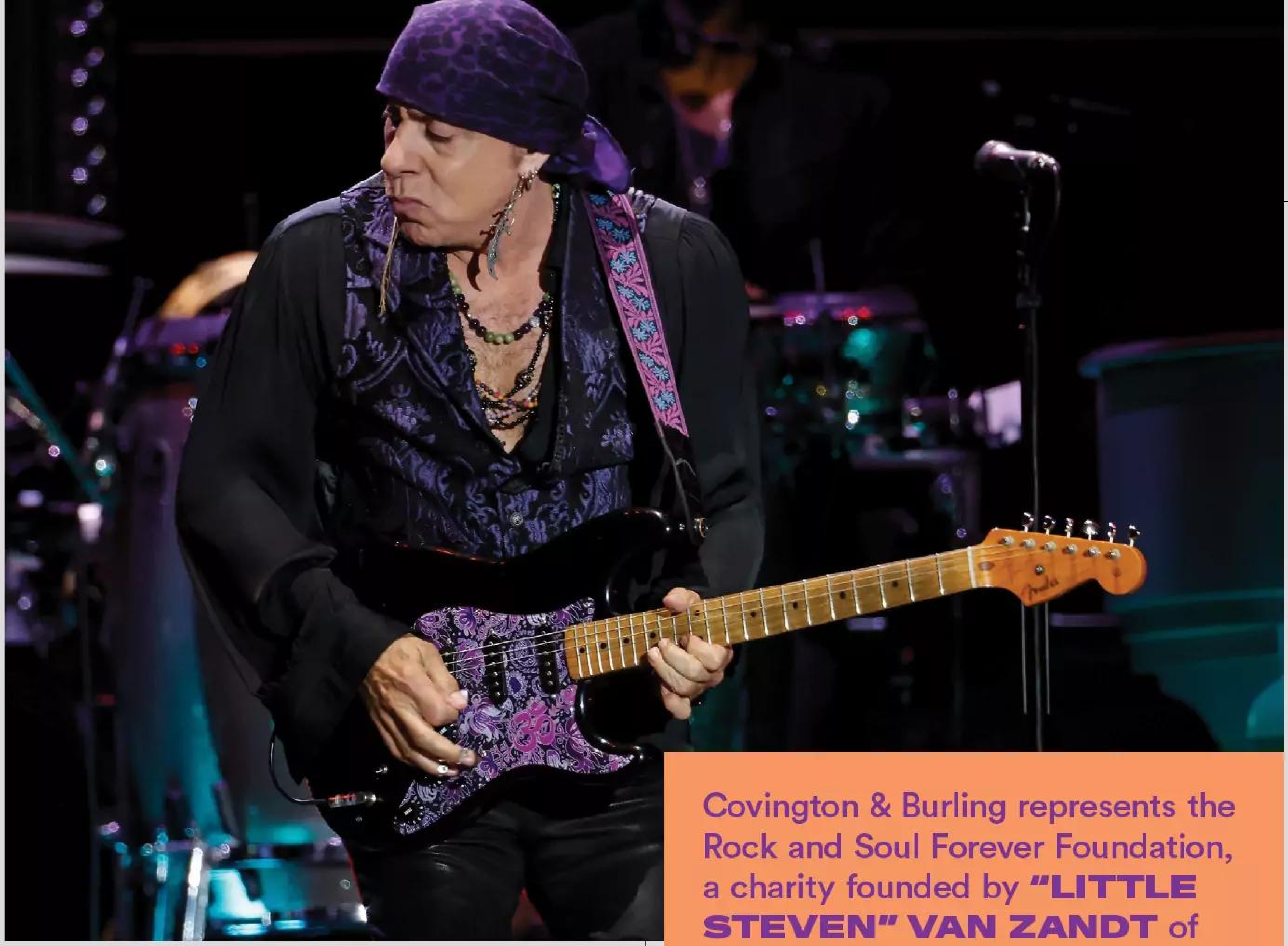

Covington & Burling represents the Rock and Soul Forever Foundation, a charity founded by **"LITTLE STEVEN" VAN ZANDT** of The E Street Band that includes TeachRock.org, a curriculum that uses music to help students from kindergarten through 12th grade in all academic disciplines.

TAYLOR HILL/WIREIMAGE

Aliya Nelson
PARTNER
Sandra Brown
Alan Clarke
Jerry Juste
OF COUNSEL
GREENSPOON MARDER

In negotiations handled by Clarke, Greenspoon Marder represented boutique music rights investment company MusicBird in its latest portfolio expansion that covered mixing and neighboring rights. The acquisition marked MusicBird's sixth investment since 2021, expanding its portfolio to more than 1,500 songs across 70 different artists with a catalog that boasts album sales of over 50 million units globally, according to the firm, including collaborations with acts such as Jason Derulo, OneRepublic and One Direction. Greenspoon Marder also represents Durand Bernarr's DSing Records, Akon and Jermaine Dupri, among others.

Most pressing issue "Fair compensation for artists in the streaming era," Clarke says. "To address this challenge, it would require an industrywide collaboration to create a more equitable revenue model to ensure artists are being fairly compensated."

Matt Oppenheim
CO-FOUNDING PARTNER/MANAGING PARTNER
Scott Zebrak
CO-FOUNDING PARTNER
Jeff Gould
Alexander Kaplan
PARTNERS
OPPENHEIM + ZEBRAK

Two years after music publishers including Universal Music Group, Concord Music Group and ABKCO (all Oppenheim + Zebrak clients) filed a complaint against Anthropic over the unlawful use of lyrics to train its AI models, a judge approved an agreement in January saying Anthropic must maintain existing guardrails to train future AI models and music publishers may intervene when they suspect copyright infringement. But in March, the court declined the publishers' request for an injunction that would have immediately blocked Anthropic from using copyrighted lyrics to train said models, saying the music companies could not show that they faced the kind of "irreparable harm" necessary to win such a drastic remedy.

Most pressing issue "After years of efforts to build a sustainable and profitable streaming business," Oppenheim says, "we are now seeing numerous efforts to improperly divert streaming payments from the legitimate music industry."

Ed Pagano
PARTNER
Casey Higgins
SENIOR COUNSEL
AKIN GUMP

As the top lawyers for the National Independent Venue Association and the Fix the Tix Coalition, Higgins and Pagano have been working on both state and federal legislation to repair the ticket-buying experience for fans and combat scalpers. Last year, Fix the Tix worked closely with a bipartisan coalition of members of both chambers of Congress, along with artists like Chappell Roan, to introduce the Fans First Act. They argue that FFA is a stronger version of the TICKET Act, which Higgins and Pagano also led negotiations for and became the first ticketing-reform legislation to pass either chamber of Congress when the House of Representatives voted in favor of it in May 2024.

Most pressing issue "Venues and artists continue to face a complex set of challenges causing economic strain that threatens the independent music ecosystem," Higgins says. "If venues can't afford to operate and artists can't afford to tour, what are the alternatives?"

Lulu M. Pantin
PARTNER
LOOP LEGAL

The firm's clients include artists Thundercat and Flying Lotus, producer Trackside, artist-songwriter Georgia Ku and multi-instrumentalist/singer Pedro Martins, as well as athletes, music festivals, art galleries and executives. "We treat catalogs as family heirlooms," Pantin says. "Each heirloom receives white-glove service, with a strategy uniquely tailored to the family's goals. It is reminiscent of my first job in music working on the Jim Morrison, Rick James, Janis Joplin and Tupac Shakur estates, where I learned art's impact and value can be perpetual. Work like this furthers our mission to make music a sustainable asset."

Most pressing issue "Sexual misconduct and exploitation. #MeToo did not improve the music community. Violent offenders continue to be nominated for — and win — Grammy Awards. I am alarmed by how many victims I've encountered while working on routine entertainment transactions."

Don Passman
Ethan Schiffres
PARTNERS
Gene Salomon
MANAGING PARTNER
GANG TYRE RAMER BROWN & PASSMAN

Last fall, client Taylor Swift wrapped her 149-date, two-year The Eras Tour, reportedly earning more than $2 billion — and fellow client P!nk concluded her 18-month Summer Carnival tour, which, with nearly $700 million grossed, became the second-highest-grossing tour in history among women, behind only Swift's multibillion-dollar juggernaut. The Beverly Hills firm also oversaw Randy Newman's October sale of his share of his recorded-music and publishing rights to Litmus Music. "Randy's a national treasure," Salomon says. That deal followed client Neil Finn of Crowded House and Split Enz selling his publishing catalog to Primary Wave in April 2024.

The music industry today in a word "Exciting," Salomon says. "There's so much opportunity right now. The business has found its footing after a number of years of difficult times."

Roger L. Patton
FOUNDER/PRINCIPAL
LAW OFFICES OF ROGER L. PATTON

Patton — whose clients include Africa Creative Agency, Grammy-winning South African star Tyla and producers RoccStar (Chris Brown), Bankroll Got It (Megan Thee Stallion, Latto) and Nick Lee (Ariana Grande, Lil Nas X) — says he "recently structured a label distribution deal" for Africa Creative Agency's new record label, Exodus Records. "The mission of Exodus Records is to dispel the notion that Afrobeats is the only genre of music from Africa," Patton says. "They are dedicated to introducing the world to myriad African musical genres including African hip-hop, R&B, neo-soul, *kwaito*, Afro house, *amapiano*, Afro-fusion and more."

Most pressing issue "The devaluation of music by the streaming platforms — paying minuscule fractions of pennies for streams. While streaming has revolutionized access to music, it has drastically reduced the economic value of recorded music, making it nearly impossible for new artists to sustain themselves without big-brand deals or touring."

Michael Perlstein
Robert Lieberman
PARTNERS
FISCHBACH PERLSTEIN LIEBERMAN & ALMOND

Over the past year, Fischbach Perlstein Lieberman & Almond oversaw the sale of music catalogs to BMG and peermusic and the acquisition of catalogs for GoDigital and parent company Cinq Recordings; those deals totaled over $100 million. And although client Bob Dylan joined TikTok this year — debuting with a single post in January that urged potential followers to "explore the world of Bob Dylan, now on TikTok" — Lieberman says that social media stats have become too prominent in the modern industry. "Without social media numbers, it is impossible for talented new recording artists to get noticed," he says. "Talent is talent, which may not be reflected in their social media numbers."

Advice for AI now "Do not grant your name and likeness rights in connection with artificial intelligence creation of your songs or recordings," Lieberman says.

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William Briggs and Josh Rosenberg

Billboard 2025 Top Music Lawyers

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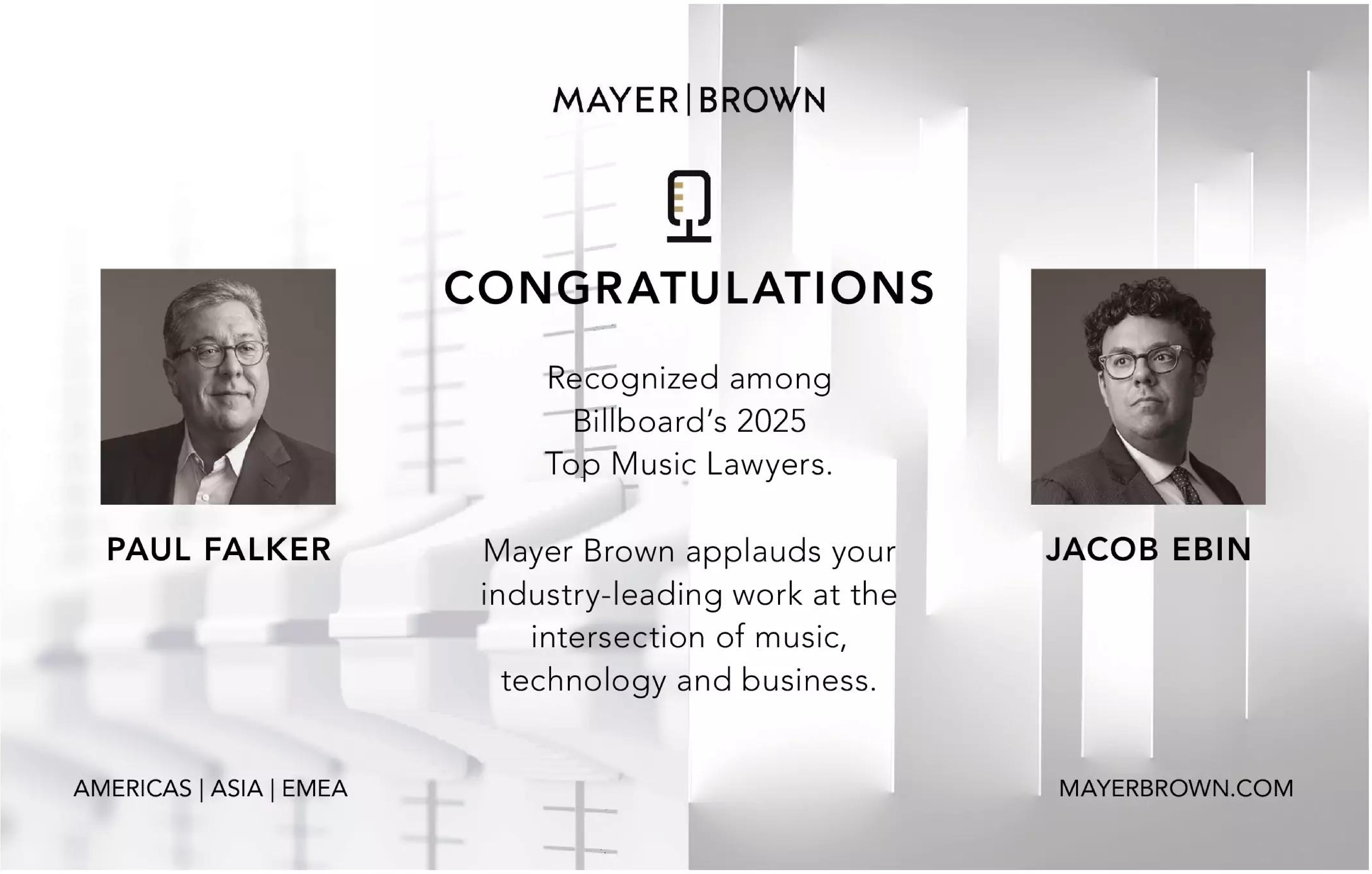

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Mayer Brown applauds your industry-leading work at the intersection of music, technology and business.

JACOB EBIN

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Adrian Perry
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP/CO-CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP

Neema Sahni
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP/CO-CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP/CO-CHAIR OF COMMERCIAL LITIGATION PRACTICE

Jonathan Sperling
PARTNER/CHAIR OF MUSIC INDUSTRY GROUP

Phillip Hill
SPECIAL COUNSEL

COVINGTON & BURLING

The firm represents industry leaders like Sony Music Entertainment and BMI and represented Vice President Kamala Harris in music-related matters during her presidential bid, including the licensing of Beyoncé's anthemic "Freedom" for the candidate's campaign launch announcement. The firm also represents companies on the vanguard of AI, like Jen Music AI and Image-Line Software. "AI isn't going anywhere, and like other technological advances, the industry should seek to harness it," Perry says. "Staying on the sidelines will not ease anyone's fears or allow the industry to take advantage of the benefits of these innovations."

Charity we support "We represent the Rock and Soul Forever Foundation, a charity founded by 'Little Steven' Van Zandt of The E Street Band," Perry says. "It seeks to integrate music and music history into school curricula to make learning more accessible and relevant, which is something we really enjoy supporting as pro bono counsel."

Daniel Petrocelli
TRIAL PRACTICE CHAIR/FIRM VICE CHAIR

David Marroso
GENERAL LITIGATION PRACTICE CHAIR

Leah Godesky
PARTNER

Terrence Dugan
OF COUNSEL

O'MELVENY & MYERS

O'Melveny & Myers represents the performing rights company Global Music Rights, "the innovative startup that advocates for composers such as Bruno Mars, Don Henley, Lizzo, Bad Bunny, Nicki Minaj, Bruce Springsteen, Gwen Stefani and Harry Styles," Petrocelli says. In January 2024, GMR filed a copyright lawsuit against Vermont Broadcast Associates, a Vermont-based group of seven radio stations, for allegedly playing 66 songs in the GMR catalog since 2017 without a license, amounting to 1,600 violations of copyright law. In April, GMR and VBA reached an agreement that includes a long-term GMR license, as well as settlement of past alleged infringements.

Advice about AI now "Protection of artists and their rights is and will always be the most paramount issue in the music industry," Petrocelli says. "Without the blood, sweat and tears and creative brilliance of artists, there would be no music."

Tabetha D. Plummer
FOUNDER/CEO

PLUMMER LAW GROUP

CO-FOUNDER/PARTNER

PLUMMER CARLYLE WILLIAMS

Plummer cites the "powerful and strategic merger" of her Plummer Law Group with Carlyle Legal and Group 1 Law as a recent professional milestone "combining decades of expertise in sports, entertainment, intellectual property and corporate law." Clients include Grammy winner and Super Bowl LIX performer Ledisi, Emmy-winning music director Adam Blackstone and former NFL star/Colorado Buffaloes head coach Deion Sanders. "This groundbreaking partnership creates a full-service legal powerhouse designed to offer a broader, more dynamic platform, deliver innovative strategies and provide next-level client service," Plummer says.

Most pressing issue "The introduction of new technology resulting in a drastic decline in sales and revenue distribution for music creators — artists, producers and songwriters, [as well as] job layoffs throughout a once thriving and very lucrative industry."

Ritholz Levy Fields represented **CYNDI LAUPER** in a deal with Swedish entertainment company Pophouse, which included her music assets and the creation of a joint venture for the exploitation of her music and name, image and likeness.

RIVER CALLAWAY FOR VARIETY

Michael Poster
PARTNER/MUSIC ACQUISITIONS AND FINANCING CHAIR

MICHELMAN & ROBINSON

The firm's client GoldState Music acquired portfolios of music publishing and recorded-music royalty income streams from music asset investment firms CatchPoint Rights and AMR Songs. Both deals employed a structure adapted from private equity exit transactions, "which is rarely used in the music industry," Poster says. "This required a knowledge of music rights, corporate structure and the methods used in other industries to sell these types of portfolios of rights in an efficient manner." The CatchPoint portfolio includes stakes in Ye's "Flashing Lights" (featuring Dwele) and Sheryl Crow's "If It Makes You Happy." Meanwhile, the AMR catalog includes John Sebastian's writer's share of the Lovin' Spoonful tracks "Summer in the City," "Daydream" and "Do You Believe in Magic."

Charities I support "City Harvest, The Trevor Project, the Environmental Defense Fund, Doctors Without Borders and my alma mater, the University of Massachusetts."

Edwin J. Prado
FOUNDER

PRADO LAW OFFICES

Prado's client roster includes Puerto Rican stars Don Omar, MC Ceja, Darell, Anuel AA and Bryant Myers, whom he has represented in various capacities. Most recently, he negotiated deals with Kobalt for producer HYDRO (Bad Bunny, Eladio Carrión), songwriter-producer Angel Sandoval (Peso Pluma, Grupo Firme) and producer-composer BASSY (Eladio Carrión). Two high-profile criminal cases have been on his docket in the last year: He successfully defended Puerto Rican rapper CDobleta, helping him obtain the dismissal of weapon charges, and is representing the artist in a federal capital murder case. Prado also represented record executive-producer Raphy Pina, who was released from prison last year, in his criminal case for gun possession and his appellate process.

The music industry today in a word "Transformative. This term encapsulates the dynamic and evolving nature of the music industry."

Gregor Pryor
MANAGING PARTNER, EUROPE AND MIDDLE EAST

Steve Sessa
PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRY GROUP

Josh Love
Eric Marder
Ed Shapiro
PARTNERS

REED SMITH

Reed Smith counts among its A-list clients Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, Justin Bieber, Bon Jovi, The Smashing Pumpkins, Korn, Kesha, Lil Uzi Vert, John Summit, Kaskade, Fatboy Slim, Concord, Sony, Lyric, Kobalt, Hipgnosis, Litmus, Iconic, Seeker, Roc Nation, Amazon Music, SoundCloud, YouTube, Firebird and BandLab. "Given the breadth and scope of our practice," Sessa says, "the biggest legal issue involving our firm is maintaining a neutral position to advise clients on all sides of the AI debate."

Advice about AI now "Be cautious when using AI tools in your creative process," Sessa says. "AI-generated content is likely to be considered copyright-free and in the public domain, which can make works that incorporate it unprotectable. While the legal framework is still developing, the current reality presents significant risks for artists and rights holders."

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William T. "Bill" Ramsey
Mariam Stockton

PARTNERS

NEAL & HARWELL

Ramsey and Stockton work with some of country music's biggest names, including Garth Brooks, Kenny Chesney, Keith Urban, Taylor Swift and Tanya Tucker. One of their biggest recent victories came in January 2024, when charges of assault and resisting arrest against client Chris Young after an alleged altercation at a bar were dismissed. "We were pleased that the baseless charges against our client were dismissed, reaffirming that our client should never have been arrested in the first place," Ramsey says. The firm also aided in the negotiation of recording contracts for two country acts and took action against stalkers of high-profile artists.

Advice about AI now "I am concerned that the use of AI will 'homogenize' music," Ramsey says. "I feel that my clients should focus on being innovative and explore new creative opportunities. The best defense is to focus on the human and empathetic side of music."

Rollin Ransom
Matthew Thompson

CO-LEADERS OF ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS AND MEDIA GROUP

SIDLEY AUSTIN

Sidley Austin represented a sponsor consortium comprising global asset manager DWS Group and investor and manager of niche media music rights Cutting Edge Group in the creation of a joint venture with Warner Bros. Discovery. The transaction is "one of the largest and highest-valued music rights deals ever executed, covering almost a century's worth of music copyrights," Thompson says, adding that the firm advised on all aspects of the transaction, including asset acquisition/contribution regarding the partnership. The joint venture involves over 400,000 iconic film/TV songs from such entities as DC Comics movies and the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises.

Most pressing issue "Monetization of music assets on subscription platforms at fair and equitable rates for all parties involved," Thompson says, "including artists, labels, consumers and platforms themselves."

Berkeley Reinhold

OWNER

REINHOLD GLOBAL

Reinhold's range of expertise is as varied as her clientele, with her Reinhold Global firm representing major names in touring, entertainment and sports including Wrexham, Magnus Media, Tuff Gong Worldwide, Marc Anthony, Ziggy Marley and Thievery Corporation. Client Live Nation had another record year in 2024 with $23.2 billion in revenue, while festival client Lollapalooza broke its attendance record for the largest day crowd ever in the event's 30-plus-year history with Chappell Roan's performance. Over the past year, Reinhold and her firm have been combating the exploitation of name, image and likeness rights for college athletes in the age of AI and holograms.

Most pressing issue "Climate change. This brings about not only unpredictable weather patterns but also poor air quality, disrupted utilities and the spread of infectious diseases, all of which have a substantial impact on the concert business."

Attorney Todd Rubenstein negotiated publishing and catalog deals for Grammy-winning songwriter of the year **THERON THOMAS.**

JASON ARMOND/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

Adam Ritholz

FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER

Jeff Levy
Chip Petree

PARTNERS

RITHOLZ LEVY FIELDS

Ritholz Levy Fields manages a diverse portfolio of clients, including Grammy Award winners Chris Stapleton and Maxwell and video-game publishers Rockstar and 2K. Last year, the firm notched several key wins, representing Cyndi Lauper, in a transaction with Swedish entertainment company Pophouse covering her music assets and the creation of a joint venture for the exploitation of her music and name, image and likeness, and Concord Music Group, as the indie music giant acquired parts of Daddy Yankee's music publishing and recorded-music catalog. The latter deal encompasses certain rights to the reggaetón superstar's songs including "Con Coma" and his rights as an artist on "Despacito."

Advice about AI now "For our artist clients, put it out of your mind," Ritholz says. "Write, perform and record the music that comes through you. AI is irrelevant to you."

Carlos Rodríguez-Feliz

MANAGING PARTNER

RODFEL LAW

RodFel Law "was involved in the negotiation for Young Miko's U.S. tour with Live Nation [and] her Coachella performance, among others," says Rodríguez-Feliz, whose current clients also include RaiNao, ROA and Villano Antillano. Following Young Miko's Coachella debut, the Puerto Rican star launched her 2024 XOXO Tour throughout the United States. "We played 40 minutes" when touring in 2023, Young Miko told *Billboard* for her September cover story. "Now I'm onstage for two hours. Our crew was like 10 people; now it's more than 50 of us. Everything has multiplied." Her album *att.*, released last year, reached No. 9 on Top Latin Albums.

Advice about AI now "It is a very useful tool to incorporate if used properly. Always be mindful and respectful of other creators' rights when using AI."

Bobby Rosenbloum

CHAIRMAN OF GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Jonathan Koby

SHAREHOLDER OF GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Jeff Biederman
Steve Plinio
Charmaine Smith

SHAREHOLDERS OF ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Paul Schindler

SENIOR CHAIR OF NEW YORK ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Jess Rosen

CO-CHAIRMAN OF ATLANTA ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Jay Cooper

SHAREHOLDER/FOUNDER OF LOS ANGELES ENTERTAINMENT

GREENBERG TRAURIG

In October, the Recording Academy announced that beginning in 2027, after 50-plus years on CBS, the Grammys ceremony will call ABC and fellow Walt Disney Co. properties Disney+ and Hulu home — a historic agreement Greenberg Traurig helped facilitate. "We led the negotiations on behalf of the Recording Academy for its unprecedented 10-year global television and media rights deal with Disney and ABC Television," says Rosenbloum, whose firm represents Katy Perry, George Strait and the Miles Davis estate, among others. "This landmark agreement is one of the largest non-sports television deals of all time."

Most pressing issue "The increasing fragmentation of rights, particularly when considering the rise of international music platforms, makes it increasingly difficult for new offerings to launch," Rosenbloum says. "This, in turn, serves as an inhibiting factor to growth and expansion of the market, limiting revenue opportunities for music creators."

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Oswaldo Rossi
FOUNDER/MANAGING PARTNER

John Baldivia
Pamela Klein
Gary Fine
PARTNERS

ROSSI BALDIVIA KLEIN FINE & SPECTOR

The attorneys of Rossi Baldivia Klein Fine & Spector recently managed Karol G's high-stakes deals, including a lucrative merchandise arrangement with Bravado and a collaboration with Coke Studio that resulted in billboards in Japan featuring the Colombian star. The firm secured an extension of the publishing administration agreement for Peso Pluma and George Prajin's Double P Records with Downtown Music Publishing that includes work from Peso, as well as Tito Double P, Jasiel Nuńez and Estevan Plazola, and it also worked on Venezuelan singer Danny Ocean's 2024 *Reflexa* tour that ran through the United States and Mexico. Additional clients include artists such as Rauw Alejandro and executives such as Rimas Records founder Noah Assad and Rancho Humilde founder Jimmy Humilde.
Charity I support "Con Cora," Baldivia says, "Karol G's foundation for empowering women."

Paul Rothenberg
Jeremy Mohr
Josh Binder
FOUNDING PARTNERS

ROTHENBERG MOHR & BINDER

The firm played a pivotal role in orchestrating SZA's appearance during Kendrick Lamar's Super Bowl LIX halftime show that drew a record-breaking 133.5 million viewers, according to Apple Music and the NFL. It also worked with Doechii to secure her February performance at the Grammys, where she became only the third woman in history to win best rap album for her breakout mixtape, *Alligator Bites Never Heal*.
Advice about AI now "I'm conflicted, as I believe songwriting and recording are sacred human art forms and the intellectual property rights of creators must be protected at all costs. But I've seen what happens when our business ignores or attempts to completely kill new technologies, and it's not pretty," Mohr says. "This genie is not going back in the bottle. My advice is [to] embrace and find ways to use technology — in legal and ethical ways — to help creators but not to shortcut or replace them."

Todd Rubenstein
FOUNDING PARTNER

TODD RUBENSTEIN LAW

Among Rubenstein's latest achievements are negotiating publishing and catalog deals for Grammy songwriter of the year Theron Thomas and negotiating a new-model label distribution and funding deal for client Skillet after closing a catalog deal with Primary Wave covering the band's first five albums of masters and songs. He advised and negotiated on behalf of Poems — the new publishing company of hit producers The Monsters & Strangerz and long-term partners Mega House — in connection with funding and administration agreements with Kobalt, as well as a co-funding deal with Position Music for songwriter Jack LaFrantz (Benson Boone's "Beautiful Things"). He also handled deals for viral sensation "Man in Finance" creator Megan Boni.
The music industry today in a word "Gig economy. Yes, that's two words, but one phrase."

Daniel Schacht
PARTNER

DONAHUE FITZGERALD

Schacht represents a diverse group of heavy-hitting artists in multiple genres. Ranging from Carlos Santana to Missy Elliott, as well as the estate of Malik Taylor, who was professionally known as A Tribe Called Quest's Phife Dawg. Schacht specializes in several areas including advising artists and creators on how to best control their name, image and likeness rights. Recently, he won a jury verdict in favor of Wixen Music U.K. in litigation with Transparence Entertainment Group. The case focused on a trade secret matter involving neighboring rights. The firm also did legal work for albums including Carlos Santana's *Sentient* and mxmtoon's *liminal spaces*.
Charity I support "We like to support the local Oakland [Calif.] community and its businesses. Like many communities, Oakland is brimming with creativity and talent and is still rebuilding after the pandemic."

Brianna Schwartz
Alexis Schreiber
FOUNDING PARTNERS

SCHWARTZ & SCHREIBER

Schwartz & Schreiber aided music festivals including Vibra Urbana and Deep House Bible in navigating the legal landscape of launching and managing live events. "We're passionate about the live-performance space because it offers a unique opportunity to see our work come to life in an impactful and dynamic way," Schreiber says. Additionally, the firm served as general counsel for its extensive roster of clients — such as Rolling Loud co-founder Matt Zingler, Secuoya Studios, RIVA Studios and Pitbull and his businesses — through mergers and acquisitions, from entity formation to corporate structuring to negotiating agreements.
Most pressing issue "The need for alternative revenue streams for artists," Schreiber says. "In today's industry, the combination of low streaming payouts and an oversaturated market makes it challenging for artists to earn a sustainable income. Consequently, many artists rely on touring, merchandise sales and endorsement opportunities for income; however, these avenues often demand substantial upfront investment and are not always feasible for emerging talent."

John E. Seay
OWNER

THE SEAY FIRM

With a background in the industry as a musician and tour manager, Seay leads legal battles for artists such as Faye Webster, Rylo Rodriguez, the estate of Ol' Dirty Bastard, Priscilla Block, Model/Actriz, Baby Kia, Nino Paid and Homixide Gang and producers like Roark Bailey, Bandplay and Truebeatzz. The firm has closed millions of dollars' worth of recording and publishing deals for artist and producer clients in the past year alone, according to Seay.
The music industry today in a word "Fluid. Labels and artists keep finding new ways to do deals and make money, and it's our job as lawyers to continue to make sure that the 'asks' from labels align with the actual risks they're taking in the deals they're offering."

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Brooklyn Law School (Brooklyn)
Enrollment: 1,198

Columbia Law School, Columbia University (New York)
Enrollment: 1,357

Fordham University School of Law (New York)
Enrollment: 1,358

Georgetown University Law Center (Washington, D.C.)
Enrollment: 2,053

Harvard Law School, Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass.)
Enrollment: 1,758

Loyola Law School, Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles)
Enrollment: 1,015

New York University School of Law (New York)
Enrollment: 1,413

Southwestern Law School (Los Angeles)
Enrollment: 922

University of California, Berkeley, School of Law (Berkeley, Calif.)
Enrollment: 1,022

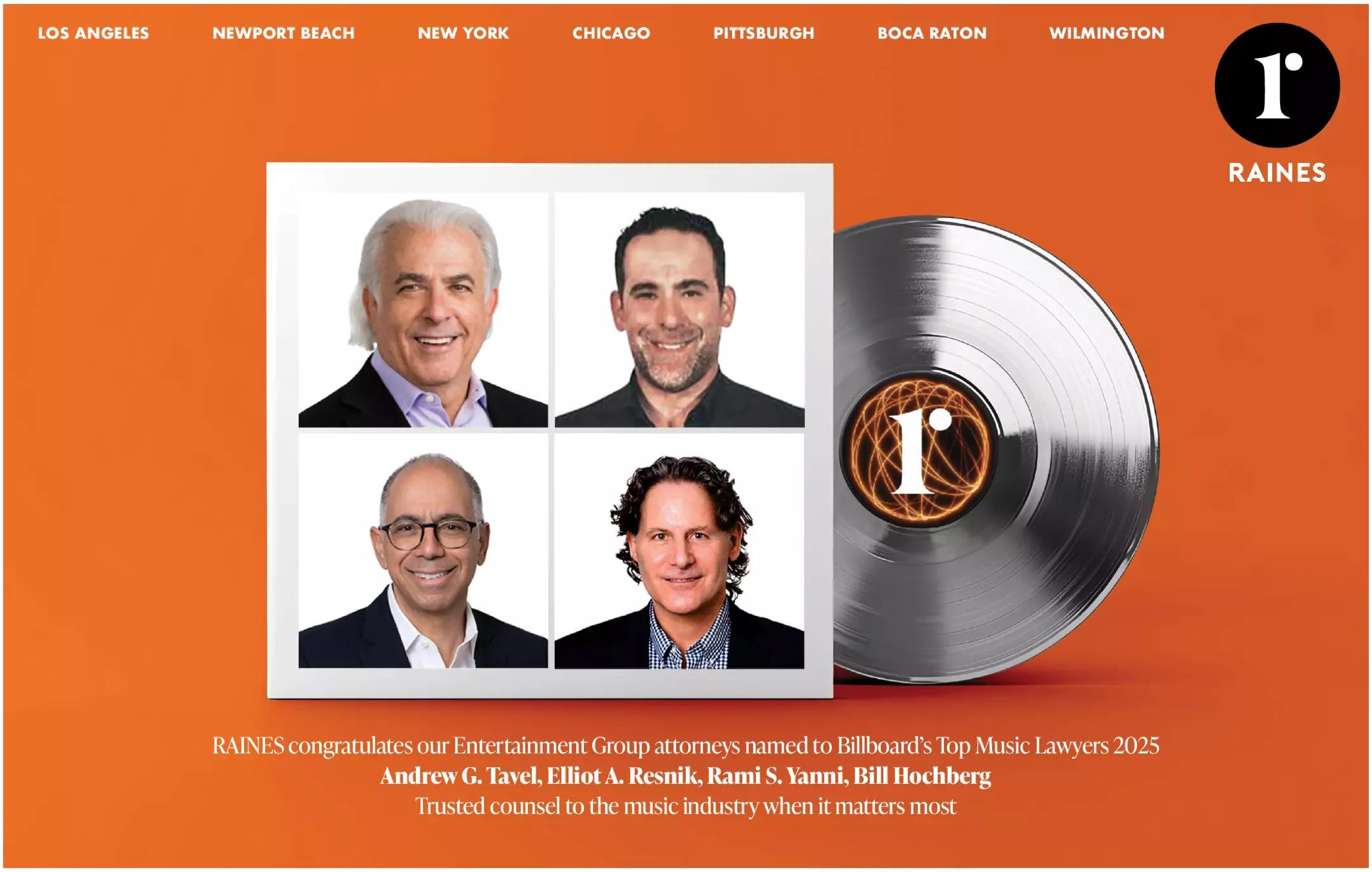
University of California, Los Angeles, School of Law (Los Angeles)
Enrollment: 1,006

University of Miami School of Law (Miami)
Enrollment: 1,149

University of Southern California Gould School of Law (Los Angeles)
Enrollment: 644

Enrollments source: U.S. News & World Report. Schools are presented alphabetically and not ranked. An alums-count tie results in 13 schools listed this year.

BILL O'LEARY/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES



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for being named among
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Attorney Advertising

Lauren Spahn of Buchalter represented **JELLY ROLL** in negotiations to open his Goodnight Nashville bar and handled his brand and intellectual property portfolio, both nationally and internationally.

Michael Selverne

MANAGING PARTNER

SELVERNE BRADFORD

While Selverne declines to provide client names or notable deals he and his firm worked on in 2024, it has been reported that his clients include Spin Doctors, Cheap Trick, Alibaba Music and Round Hill Music Group. Moreover, Selverne has been known to represent songwriters, artists, producers and companies in shopping their music assets. For example, in 2023, he provided legal representation for Round Hill when it was buying music assets as well as handling the sale of its publicly traded royalty fund to Concord for about $470 million.

Most pressing issue “Bloating and overcrowding. While most people are creative and artistic, that does not make them artists. The uploading of 200,000-plus recordings per day is overwhelming to consumers and can obscure and hide truly brilliant work in a sea of mediocrity.”

Robert Sherman

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF ENTERTAINMENT FINANCE PRACTICE

DLA PIPER

Sherman’s client list at DLA Piper includes Concord, HarbourView Equity Partners, Duetti, Multimedia Music, Catch Point Royalties Holdings, Mom + Pop Music, Bella Figura Music, beatBread and City National Bank. In 2024, he represented Concord in one of the larger asset-backed securities deals of the year. Concord raised $850 million in October from an existing asset-backed security that ballooned to $5.1 billion after the acquisition of Round Hill Music Group and Mojo Music. The security is backed by the royalties of publishing, recorded music and related assets by such acts as Carrie Underwood, Genesis, Phil Collins, R.E.M. and Creed. (Numerous other companies have raised capital through such securities, which allow an issuer to borrow money against the revenue created by music assets used as collateral in the transaction.)

Advice about AI now “Tread carefully while looking out for opportunities to grow the music ecosystem.”

Jodie Shihadeh

FOUNDER

SHIHADEH LAW

Years of hard work paid off for Shihadeh and her team in 2024, as they reached catalog agreements for publishing and producer royalty assets that amassed over $17.5 million for their clients. “We focused heavily on structuring their businesses” in previous years, Shihadeh says, “with the long-term focus of a sale in the future.” The firm’s roster is heavily centered on dance artists, producers and songwriters, including J. White Did It, El Guincho, Matoma and KREAM, as well as companies run by clients like Steve Aoki’s Dim Mak Records and Billy Corgan’s National Wrestling Alliance. Shihadeh also joined the advisory board for File Eaters, a nongenerative AI program that automates file exportation and delivery, serving both creatives and businesses.

Most pressing issue “The mass consolidation of the major-label system and the impact it has had and will have on developing career artists in the future.”

RICK KERN/GETTY IMAGES

Shardé Simpson
Ciara Reed

CO-FOUNDERS

SIMPSON & REED

Simpson & Reed represents a diverse roster of clients including Meek Mill, Natalie Nunn, Hotboii, The Breed and Empress Of. In the past year-and-a-half, the firm’s co-founders closed major deals for their clients for Grammy-winning projects, Super Bowl commercial placements and blockbuster films. “We’ve worked with artists, producers and executives to launch new ventures, expand existing businesses and negotiate deals that will have a lasting impact,” Simpson says. “And we’re still inking agreements that are set to shape the future of the industry.”

The music industry today in a word “Ever-evolving,” Simpson says. “It’s always changed, but the way music is distributed now is a whole different game. Streaming, social media and new platforms are giving artists more control, but they’re also forcing everyone to rethink how they make money and reach fans. You have to stay sharp to keep up.”

Simran A. Singh

MANAGING PARTNER

Michael Trauben
Christopher Navarro

PARTNERS

SINGH SINGH & TRAUBEN

Singh and partners represented Mexican pop group RBD in federal court litigation and California Labor Commission actions against the band’s former manager, Guillermo Rosas. “This case was pivotal in ensuring artist rights and financial transparency in the Latin music industry while navigating the complexities of global music contracts,” Singh says. (In October, RBD said it reached a confidential settlement with Rosas.) The firm, which represents other megastars like Daddy Yankee, Grupo Firme and Missy Elliott, also aided Ozuna in the sale of his publishing catalog to Kobalt/KMR Holdings, which Singh called “one of the most significant publishing transactions for a Latin artist,” and also negotiated the Puerto Rican star’s new deal with Sony Music Latin.

The music industry today in a word “Transformative,” Singh says. “From streaming shifts to AI disruption, the industry is in a constant state of reinvention, presenting both challenges and unprecedented opportunities for artists, labels and executives willing to adapt.”

Lauren Spahn

SHAREHOLDER

BUCHALTER

Buchalter represents clients including Ian Munsick, Paramore and Jelly Roll, and Spahn represented Jelly Roll in negotiations to open his Goodnight Nashville bar as well as handling his brand and intellectual property portfolio, both nationally and internationally. The firm also negotiated the re-signing of Kelsea Ballerini to Black River Entertainment’s roster and secured a summary judgment on behalf of the Harry Fox Agency, alongside co-defendant Spotify, in a case alleging unauthorized streaming of Eminem’s music. The court dismissed all claims against Harry Fox and Spotify, and the ruling is under appeal before the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Advice about AI now “I initially viewed AI as a disruptive force in the music industry, but as its impact has become clearer, I now see its potential benefits. A great example is Randy Travis, who lost his ability to sing after a stroke in 2013. Last year, AI technology [allowed] fans to hear him sing again — an incredible moment.”

Stanton “Larry” Stein

MANAGING PARTNER

Irene Y. Lee
Ashley R. Yeargan

PARTNERS

RUSS AUGUST & KABAT

In April 2024, Russ August & Kabat achieved a significant legal victory by overturning a $2.5 million jury verdict against Drake (a success that was “unbeknownst to him and his team,” Stein says). The firm also played a key role in the dismissal through summary judgments of over 1,000 lawsuits against Drake in connection with the 2021 Astroworld Festival tragedy. The company has been instrumental in protecting, enforcing and managing the intellectual property of Mariah Carey, Mary J. Blige, Cardi B and others, successfully defended Black Label Media in a copyright case involving music used in a Whitney Houston biopic and obtained a judgment in favor of Tyga in a legal action seeking to recover over $3 million in damages.

Most pressing issue “Artists still deal with paparazzi who capture images of the artists, obtain copyright registrations on the images and demand six-figure damages from the artists for posting such images featuring themselves,” Stein says.

Rachel Stilwell

FOUNDER

STILWELL LAW

One of the company’s biggest cases in the past year involved clients musicFIRST Coalition and Future of Music Coalition. “I secured a win before the [Federal Communications Commission] when the agency declined to allow local radio monopolies,” Stilwell says. “Subsequently, a group of broadcasters sued the FCC in an attempt to reverse that decision. That lawsuit is now in the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, where I co-authored an amicus brief on behalf of musicFIRST and FMC.” The firm’s other clients include LeAnn Rimes, Noel Schajris, Take 6 and songwriter Darrell Brown. Regarding the challenges created by the rise of AI, Stilwell says, “We should all be advocating for the passage of the NO FAKES Act.”

The music industry today in a word “Hopeful. The Grammy category this year for best new artist was filled with unspeakably great talent.”

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Michael Sukin
PARTNER
SUKIN COLTON LAW ASSOCIATION

Known for its expertise in music publishing, recording, catalog purchases and company sales, Sukin Colton is a leader in entertainment law. This past year, Sukin led the way on numerous film, TV, recording and publishing projects for the firm's list of clients, which includes the estates of George Gershwin and Aretha Franklin; the latter waived all usage fees for the late soul singer's song "Think" for Vice President Kamala Harris' 2024 presidential campaign. The firm also represents St. Nicholas Music, which is home to the catalog of Christmas classics by the late Johnny Marks.

Ron Sweeney
FOUNDER
RON SWEENEY AND COMPANY

Sweeney became the attorney and confidant of Clarence Avant, the late "godfather of Black music," at age 25 and ran Avant's Tabu Records for a while. Through the years, his clients have included a who's who of R&B and hip-hop: James Brown, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, Swizz Beatz, Lil Wayne and Young Money Records, Easy-E and Ruthless Records, Irv Gotti and Murder Inc., Public Enemy, DMX, Ja Rule, Morris Day, The Time, Klymaxx and Kool & The Gang. A former president of Epic Urban, Sweeney signed Ghostface Killah, Cameron, Ginuwine, Charlie Baltimore and others, with oversight for Babyface, Luther Vandross and Michael Jackson. He has been an advocate for greater Black executive representation in the music industry and for contracts that let artists build equity and long-term wealth. Most recently, he created his own company for investments in entertainment assets.
Most pressing issue "Monetizing AI."

Andy Tavel
Elliot A. Resnik
PARTNERS/CO-CHAIRS OF ENTERTAINMENT GROUP
William Hochberg
Rami S. Yanni
PARTNERS, LOS ANGELES
RAINES FELDMAN LITTRELL

"We again did fantastic work in the catalog space, including on behalf of the legendary Itzhak Perlman for his partnership with Primary Wave," Tavel says of a late-2024 royalty deal between the violinist and the publisher. Killer Mike, another of the firm's clients, enjoyed sold-out domestic and international tours, as well as involvement in "a global campaign" for *Call of Duty: Black Ops 6*. In addition to representing the National Independent Venue Association as it "continues to fight a good fight," the firm represented All Things Go Festival, which "sold out tens of thousands of tickets in two cities for its first-ever simultaneous festival production at Forest Hills Stadium and Merriweather Post Pavilion."
The music industry today in a word "Exciting — again!" Tavel says. "The caliber of the talent in the best new artist category at the Grammys was outstanding. We're in an era where a whole new generation of stars are at the forefront with many more great talents behind them."

Seth Traxler
PARTNER
KIRKLAND & ELLIS

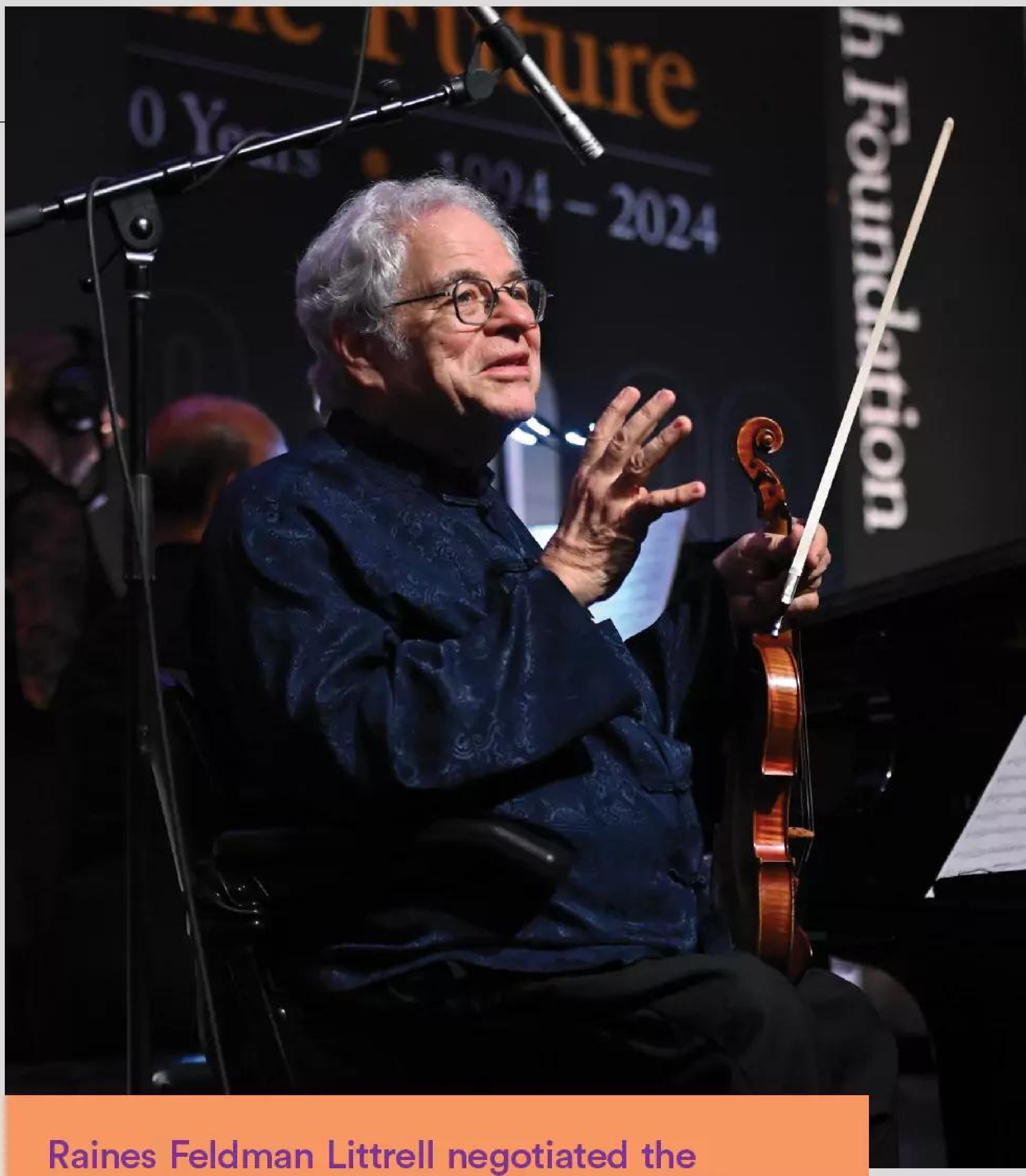
In a transaction that closed in July, Kirkland & Ellis advised longtime client Blackstone on its $1.6 billion acquisition of Hipgnosis Songs Fund, ending the history of the 6-year-old, London-listed investment trust as a publicly traded company. "This intricate deal, led by partners in our London office, navigated a competitive auction process under the oversight of the U.K.'s Panel on Takeovers and Mergers," Traxler says. Meanwhile, the firm's U.S. music team helped evaluate rights to approximately 45,000 tracks, including hits like Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'," Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" and 50 Cent's "In Da Club." The examination of those rights, Traxler says, "exemplifies Kirkland's multidisciplinary strength and our tight integration of corporate, regulatory and music industry expertise to help our clients drive transformative deals worldwide."
The music industry today in a word "Ascending."

Brittney Trigg
FOUNDING PARTNER
BTRIGGLAW

BTriggLaw "recently negotiated Lexa [Gates]' deal with Kith for its spring 2025 campaign, which also included the song 'New York to the World' with Jadakiss and Fabolous," Trigg says. On the music side, the firm "negotiated and closed numerous seven- to eight-figure agreements for its clients," she adds. That list includes DeeBaby's distribution deal with Create Music Group, PapiYerr's publishing deal with Sony Music Publishing and Rico Brooks' deal with Kobalt Music. The firm has also represented 808-Ray, who won a Grammy for Killer Mike's album *Michael*; Nickie Jon Pabón, who co-produced Jack Harlow's Hot 100 No. 1 "Lovin on Me"; and Marshak, who landed a Grammy nomination for Peso Pluma's *ÉXODO* album.
Most pressing issue "The oversaturation of music has caused a general devaluation of the music."

David Vodicka
FOUNDING PARTNER
Rob Glass
Julian Hewitt
Stephen King
Marcus Walkom
PARTNERS
MEDIA ARTS LAWYERS

Australia's Media Arts Lawyers enjoyed another robust year facilitating deals with a long list of the country's top acts and brightest newcomers. Among them, a record contract and publishing catalog sale with Tame Impala, as well as recording deals for Spacey Jane, Amyl and the Sniffers, Luude, Ruel and rising stars Teen Jesus and the Jean Teasers. The firm also advised Jet on the sale of master catalog recordings to BMG that included hits "Are You Gonna Be My Girl" and "Cold Hard Bitch"; Rüfüs Du Sol on the band's recent Exhale World Tour; and Dom Dolla on his recent trek that played New York's Madison Square Garden.
Charity I support "SupportAct," Vodicka says. It's the "Australian music industry's charity, delivering crisis relief services to musicians, managers, crew and music workers across all genres."



Raines Feldman Littrell negotiated the partnership between acclaimed violinist **ITZHAK PERLMAN** and Primary Wave.

NOAM GALAI/GETTY IMAGES

James L. Walker Jr.
CEO
WALKER & ASSOCIATES

On behalf of the estate of Isaac Hayes, Walker's firm sued the Trump presidential campaign last year for unauthorized use of the Sam & Dave classic "Hold On, I'm Comin'," which Hayes and David Porter co-wrote. "We sought an injunction in federal court," Walker says, "and the judge granted our client's request. Mr. Trump can no longer use our client's music — and Hayes is the first artist or songwriter to [win] such a legal remedy." The firm's clients also include Front Row Productions, producer of the Broadway plays *Hell's Kitchen* and *MJ: The Musical*.
Most pressing issue "[With] the use of music on the internet by streaming and digital platforms, there are billions of downloads and streaming of songs, and our clients are not seeing any of the real money."

Previn Warren
MEMBER ATTORNEY
MOTLEY RICE

Warren is known for actions against companies including SiriusXM and Google on behalf of the performing rights organization SESAC. "Motley Rice is honored to represent SESAC in advancing its interests and mission to ensure fair compensation for music creators, including the interests of its affiliated publishers and songwriters," Warren says. Along with a two-week arbitration hearing that resulted in a meaningful increase in the license fees owed by commercial radio stations represented by the Radio Music License Committee, he adds: "We are proud to have helped SESAC reinforce the value of songwriters' creative output to the music industry."
Advice about AI now "Given the current landscape, I wouldn't hold out hope for meaningful regulation or legislation around AI until at least the midterms. If you believe your rights have been violated by AI or a large language model or other AI tech, consider hiring counsel who is experienced in repurposing common law."

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Covington's global music practice offers integrated transactional, intellectual property, litigation, regulatory, and public policy expertise. We congratulate our colleagues Adrian Perry, Neema Sahni, Jonathan Sperling, and Phillip Hill for again being recognized by *Billboard* as Top Music Lawyers.

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Alex Weingarten

PARTNER/CHAIR

Michael Gottlieb
Shane Nix

PARTNERS

WILLKIE FARR & GALLAGHER

Willkie Farr & Gallagher made headlines in January when Gottlieb filed Drake's lawsuit against Universal Music Group over Kendrick Lamar's "Not Like Us," a case that accused the music giant of defamation. Willkie's lawyers recently won a ruling in the case letting discovery move forward, allowing them to seek documents like Lamar's record deal. The firm, which counts Selena Gomez, Adam Cohen, Tempo Music Investments, Jamie Spears, Dennis DeYoung and Create Music Group as clients, also represented an undisclosed band in connection with a multimillion-dollar catalog sale.

Charity we support "Willkie recently partnered with [Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services] to help establish a new substance abuse disorder treatment center for children ages 12 to 17," Nix says. "The project is made possible through a donation from the recently launched Willkie Los Angeles Foundation."

Douglas H. Wigdor

FOUNDING PARTNER

Meredith A. Firetog
Michael J. Willemin

PARTNERS

WIGDOR

Wigdor represents survivors of sexual abuse and harassment in the entertainment field, including Casandra Ventura, Julia Ormond and several Jane Doe and private clients. The firm represented Ventura in a civil case against Sean Combs that was settled in a single day. "The civil lawsuit has enabled our firm to continue challenging powerful people within the music industry, as victims of similar instances of harassment and assault now feel more comfortable in speaking up about their experiences," Wigdor says. "We have been able to help them demand accountability and change, whereas they previously felt pressured into silence."

Advice about AI now "Our cases often pull from years of communication between our client and the defendant," Wigdor says. "There is a concern that defendants may use AI-generated texts or voice memos to concoct a false narrative that discredits the victim."

Andrea Yankovsky

FOUNDER

YANKOVSKY LAW

Yankovsky represents several high-profile clients, but she's most proud of her work with those making noise behind the scenes in the music industry, such as Grammy-winning songwriter-producer Iman Jordan and boutique indie label Impex Records. Yankovsky Law last year achieved success in multiple royalty recovery cases for artists and rights holders. While the music business is ever-evolving, Yankovsky is focused on returning the rights, power and money to the hands of the individuals who keep the industry running. "Major labels and publishers could disappear, and there would still be a thriving music business," she says. "But without the people who make [music], there would be none."

Advice about AI now "In all areas of our practice, we advise clients to ask questions and not make assumptions about the law and how it applies to their circumstances."

Helen Yu

PARTNER/PRINCIPAL

YU LESEBERG

In 2024, Yu handled the key legal agreements for singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist Ty Dolla $ign's Billboard 200 No. 1 album *Vultures* and its Hot 100 No. 1 single "Carnival," both made in partnership with Ye, while the latter features Rich the Kid and Playboi Carti. Yu and her firm handled the signing of the first artist to Ty's EZMNY Records, Leon Thomas, as well as the release of Thomas' critically acclaimed second album, *MUTT*, and its Hot 100 top 40 hit title track. Yu also negotiated the joint-venture label deal for client Polo Molina's Ligas Mayores Records, which landed at Sony Music Latin Entertainment after a bidding war. In August, she represented Canadian musicians Burton Cummings and Randy Bachman of The Guess Who in recovering the group's trademark to its band name after 40 years.

The music industry today in a word "Fast-paced."

Donald S. Zakarin

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE LITIGATION AND MUSIC GROUPS AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE

Ilene S. Farkas

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND COPYRIGHT, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION AND MUSIC LITIGATION PRACTICES

James G. Sammataro

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE

Frank P. Scibilia

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND COPYRIGHT, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION, MUSIC LITIGATION AND MUSIC TRANSACTIONS PRACTICES

Benjamin Semel

PARTNER/CO-CHAIR OF THE MUSIC GROUP AND MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT LITIGATION PRACTICE

Brad D. Rose

PARTNER/CHAIR OF THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY GROUP

PRYOR CASHMAN

"AI is not a friend or foe — it's a frontier," Sammataro says. "[You must] understand its possibilities but also take the steps to ensure your creative works and assets remain protected." Pryor Cashman lawyers know about protecting copyrights. Not only do they work for the National Music Publishers' Association, Mechanical Licensing Collective, RIAA and Nashville Songwriters' Association International defending the value of music, they also count stars like Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran and Daddy Yankee, as well as the top four music publishers, among their clients. The firm is representing over 100 defendants in the pending dembow litigation, a sprawling action initiated by reggae duo Steely & Clevie that claims that more than 1,800 songs and recordings, including the hits "Despacito," "Bailando" and "Dame tu Cosita," infringe a drum pattern they say they exclusively own. "The lawsuit threatens not only the fundamental principles of copyright law," Sammataro says, "but the process of creating music."

Adam Zia

FOUNDING PARTNER

Marc Geylman
Nate Kuo

PARTNERS

THE ZIA FIRM

After his breakthrough in January with "Tweaker," rapper LiAngelo Ball (known onstage as GELO) sparked a bidding war for his music licensing — and thanks to the work of The Zia Firm, he was able to negotiate a reportedly record-breaking deal with Def Jam worth up to $13 million, with $8 million guaranteed. That's just a taste of what the practice has accomplished in the last year, along with helping breakout star Tommy Richman sign his publishing administration agreement and representing stars like Cash Cobain, MGK and French Montana.

Most pressing issue "Artists' and their teams' ability to properly register for, track and audit the various revenue streams," Zia says. "With the rapid timelines of releases, the artist has to keep up with a sizable amount of content and make sure everything being released is properly registered, monetized, collected — and collected accurately."

For **TY DOLLA $IGN** (left), Helen Yu of Yu Leseberg negotiated agreements for his No. 1 album *Vultures* and its No. 1 single "Carnival," both made in partnership with Ye.

CHRISTOPHER POLK FOR BILLBOARD

Leslie Jose Zigel
Javier Feito

PARTNERS

SMGQ LAW

In 2024, Zigel and Feito's client Carlos Vives was named the Latin Recording Academy Person of the Year. The following year, their client Bobby Weir and the other members of the Grateful Dead were honored as the 2025 MusiCares Persons of the Year. Additionally, clients Marco Antonio Solís and Los Bukis hosted the first Spanish-language residency at the Dolby Theatre at the MGM in Las Vegas. SMGQ Law also represented Rebel 11 Studios in its sale to Rimas Entertainment and the series *Chiquis Sin Filtro*, featuring artist Chiquis Rivera, which was the No. 1 show on the VIX streaming platform, according to Feito.

Charity I support "Young Musicians Unite," Feito says. "YMU serves over 9,000 students weekly, making it one of the largest nonprofit providers of free music education in the U.S. Their presence in schools doesn't just create musicians — it builds community, improves attendance and inspires excellence." b

Contributors
Trevor Anderson, Rania Aniftos, Nefertiti Austin, Lars Brandle, Dave Brooks, Anna Chan, Ed Christman, Leila Cobo, Janine Coveney, Hannah Dailey, Stephen Daw, Kyle Denis, Bill Donahue, Thom Duffy, Chris Eggertsen, Griselda Flores, Josh Glicksman, Paul Grein, Raquelle "Rocki" Harris, Lyndsey Havens, Gil Kaufman, Steve Knopper, Carl Lamarre, Elias Leight, Jason Lipshutz, Joe Lynch, Heran Mamo, Elizabeth Dilts Marshall, Taylor Mims, Gail Mitchell, Melinda Newman, Jessica Nicholson, Glenn Peoples, Sigal Ratner-Arias, Isabela Raygoza, Kristin Robinson, Jessica Roiz, Dan Rys, Michael Saponara, Damien Scott, Crystal Shepeard, Andrew Unterberger, Christine Werthman

Methodology

Billboard's Top Music Lawyers recognizes only outside counsel at law firms with the exception of in-house attorneys at market-leading companies in the sectors shown. Nominations for all of *Billboard*'s industry-sourced executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a submission link is sent by request before the nomination period. (Please email thom.duffy@billboard.com for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and for how to obtain an editorial calendar.) *Billboard*'s 2025 Top Music Lawyers were nominated by their firms and chosen by editors based on factors including the stature of their clients, as measured by year-end *Billboard* charts; sales and streaming performance; market share; revenue or, where not available, *Billboard* revenue estimates, which may be aided by company guidance; social media impressions; and radio audiences reached, using data available as of Feb. 1. Career trajectory and momentum were also considered. Where required, U.S. record-label market share was consulted using Luminate's current market share for albums, plus track-equivalent and streaming-equivalent album consumption and *Billboard*'s quarterly top 10 publisher rankings. Unless otherwise noted, Billboard Boxscore and Luminate are the sources for tour grosses and sales/streaming data, respectively. Luminate is also the source for radio audience metrics. The source for radio metrics is monitored station airplay from Mediabase provided by Luminate.

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Scott Edelman

Orin Snyder

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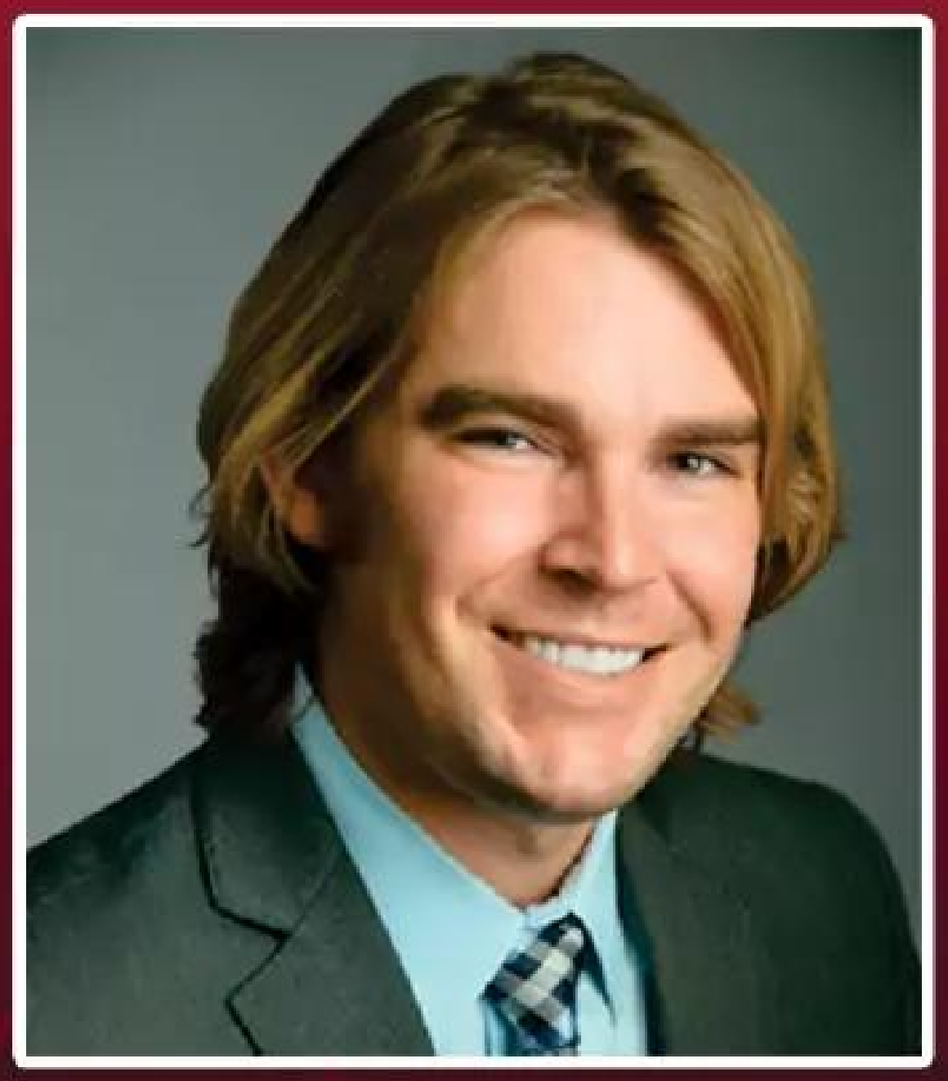
Partner, Los Angeles

Christine Lepera
Partner, New York



Brad Mullins
Partner, Los Angeles

David Steinberg
Partner, Los Angeles

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los angeles I new york I washington, d.c.

Congratulations to our partners **Derek Crownover**, **Tiffany Dunn**, **John Frankenheimer**, **Kenneth Kraus, Monika Tashman** and **Debbie White**, and all of our friends honored on *Billboard's* 2025 Top Music Lawyers list.

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Estoy profundamente agradecido con mis clientes por su confianza y colaboración. Es un privilegio poder hacer el trabajo que amo en representación de ustedes.

Su éxito es mi pasión.

Gracias a billboard por el honor de ser reconocido como uno de los Top Music Lawyers.

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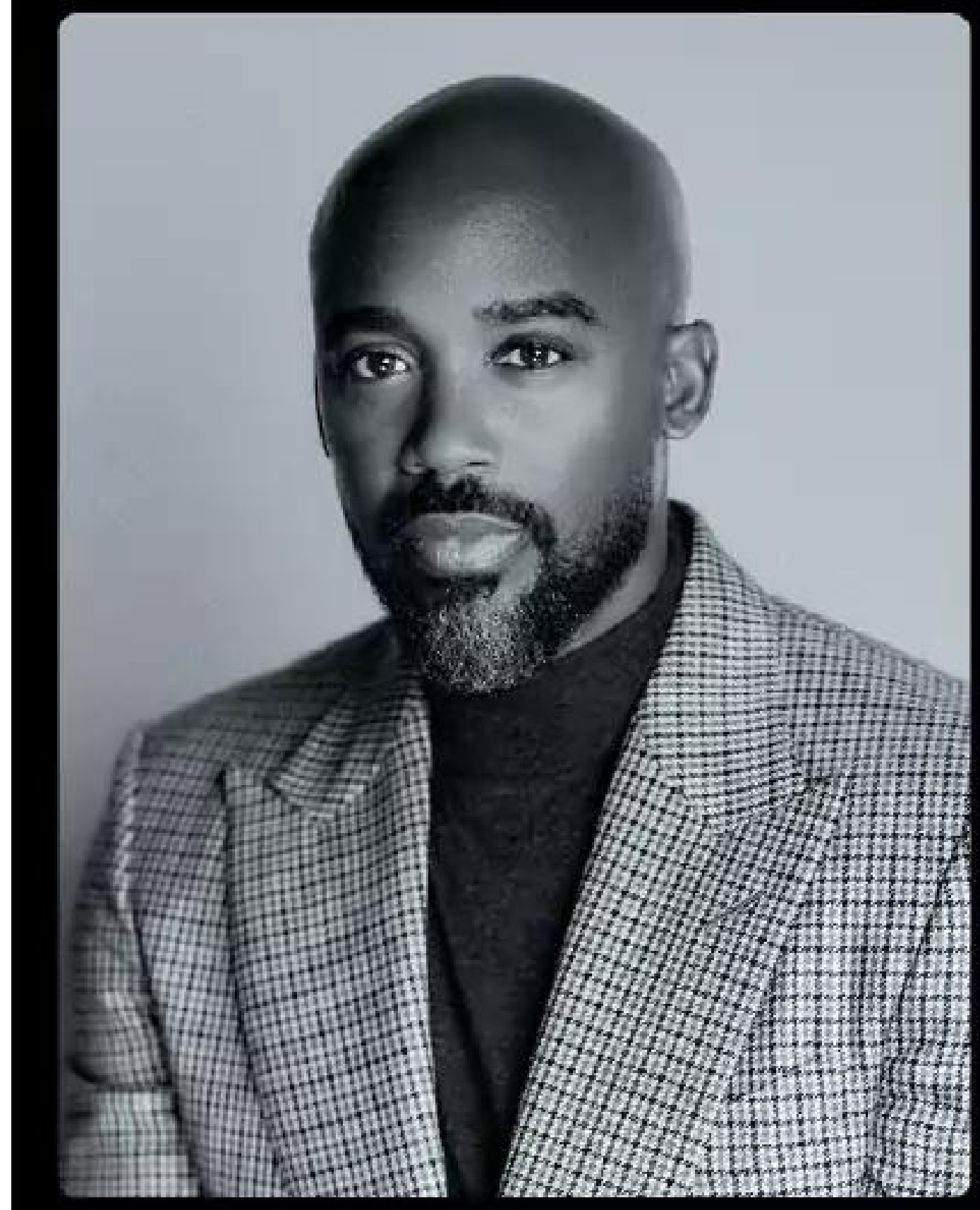

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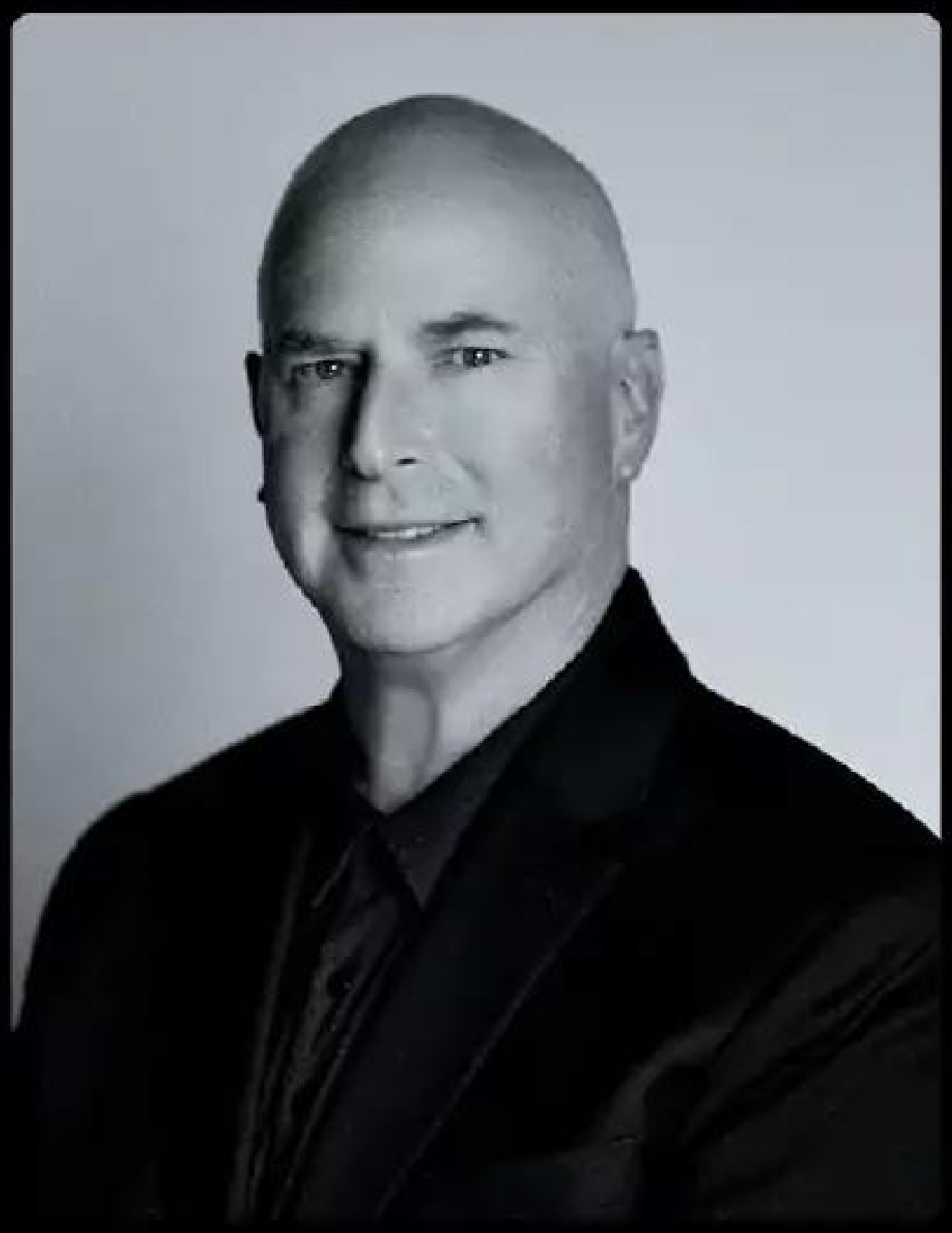

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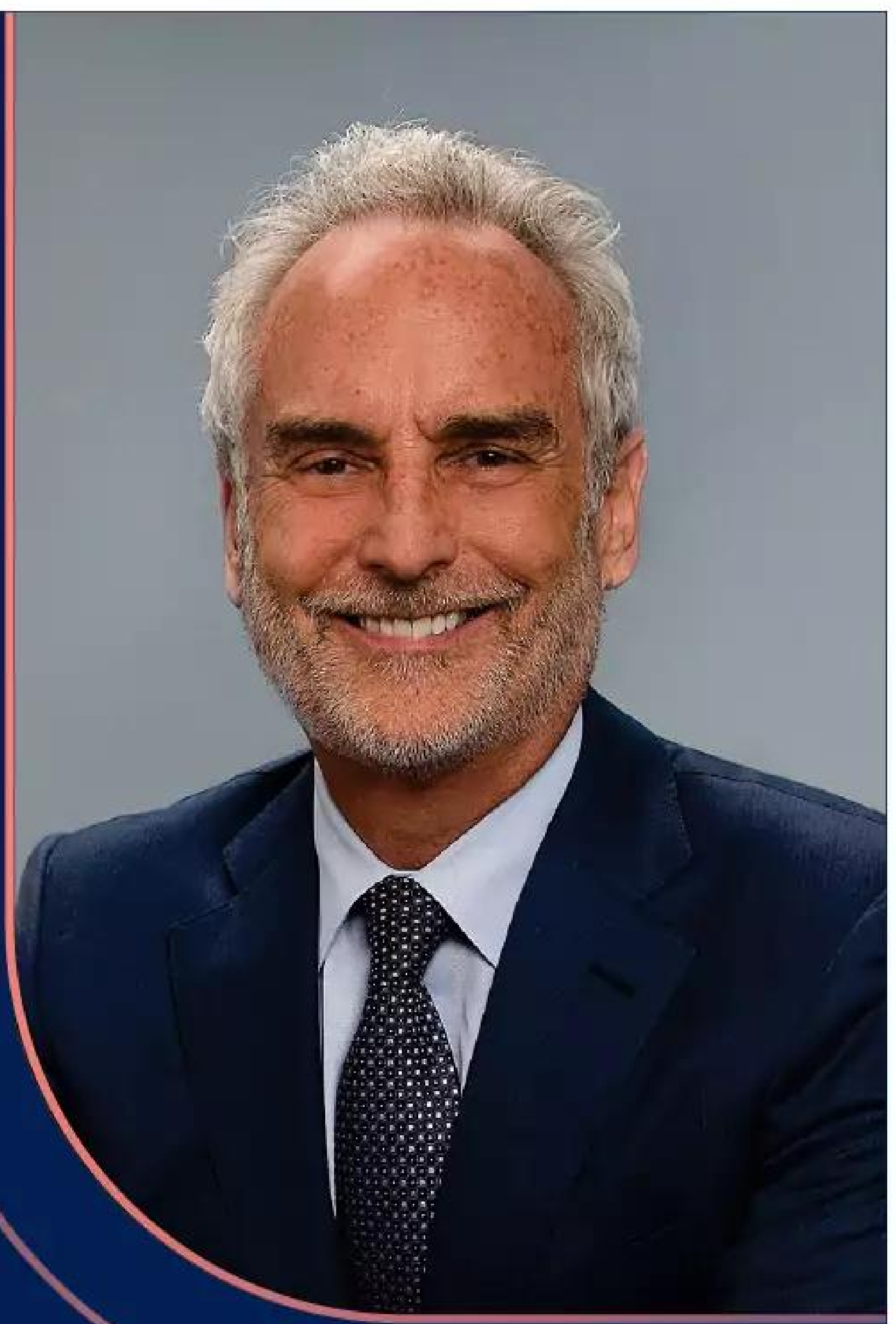
CONGRATULATIONS TO
DAMIEN GRANDERSON, GUY BLAKE, ELIZABETH MOODY,
COLIN MORRISSEY & LYNN GONZALEZ
for being named among Billboard's "Top Music Lawyers 2025".

It's a hit! Peter Anderson named to 2025 Top Music Lawyers list.

From cutting-edge royalty claims to precedent-setting copyright defense, Peter Anderson leads a noteworthy team serving the music industry's ever-changing legal needs.



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Michael Cataliotti has been a faculty member at Lawline CLE, and led town halls, workshops, and Q&A sessions at Harvard University, Columbia University, NYU, Juilliard, New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA), and the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (VLA), among others, and is a regular contributor to the New York State Bar Association's Entertainment, Arts and Sports Law Journal (EASL), where he writes a column on the topics of sports and entertainment immigration.

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AC/DC's Brian Johnson (left) and Angus Young.

Saluting AC/DC On Five Decades Of Solid Rock

The band's highway to high-decibel fame has led from Australia to around the globe

BY STEVE KNOPPER

FIFTY-ONE YEARS AGO, after trying out Zorro, Superman and gorilla costumes, Angus Young took a suggestion from his sister, borrowed her son's school uniform and wore it onstage. Since then, like his band AC/DC, the lead guitarist's live persona has been insanely consistent — he once told *Billboard* that he packs 12 schoolboy costumes for tours.

"We've never tried to do something we're not or looked around to see what the other bands were doing," Angus said in a 1996 interview. "An audience can tell when you're phony or you don't want to be onstage."

High Voltage, AC/DC's debut album, set the band's consistent musical template in 1975 when the record arrived in the group's home country of Australia. Twelve months later, it reached the United States and, after a few years, established the act as international rock stars.

Every AC/DC album since, from classics such as 1980's *Back in Black* to lesser-known gems like 1995's *Ballbreaker*, has exemplified what *Billboard* declared in a 2014 review of the *Rock or Bust* album: "Neither trends, age nor the passing of many decades has altered the basic blueprint the band laid out on its 1975 debut, *High Voltage*."

"Some people might say that you guys have made the same record over and over 10 times," an interviewer once suggested to Angus.

"That's a dirty lie!" he responded. "We've made the same record over and over 11 times!"

Of AC/DC's 19 studio albums, seven have hit the top 10 of the Billboard 200, including two No. 1s, 1981's *For Those About To Rock (We Salute You)* and 2008's *Black Ice*.

Ten of the band's tracks have earned more than 177 million streams, beginning with "Thunderstruck" at 1 billion, according to Luminate. AC/DC's touring power has been similarly steady, from 1978, when it opened for Aerosmith for multiple sold-out arena dates, to 2010, when its four best-selling concerts ever grossed $11.7 million, $12.8 million, $24.6 million and $27 million, all in Australian stadiums, according to Billboard Boxscore.

Despite the loss of Angus' brother, founding member and rhythm guitarist Malcolm Young, to dementia in 2017, AC/DC rocks on. The band opened its global *Power Up* tour on April 10 at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis.

CAA books AC/DC, with agency veterans Rob Light, Chris Dalston and Allison McGregor overseeing dates. The tour takes its name from the 2020 *Power Up* album. (The band's repertoire is released by Columbia Records in the United States and by Sony worldwide.) Alvin Handwerker of Prager Metis handles management.

On record, AC/DC began its loud and mighty run 50 years ago, with the release of *High Voltage*. The album was created in "a very economical two weeks," as Jeff Apter writes in the 2018 biography *High Voltage: The Life of Angus Young*. The second week focused on Angus' guitar solos and the controlled night-prowler shrieks of frontman Bon Scott, who died in 1980.

Angus has said of Alberts, the band's Sydney studio, "I would have liked to have taken the fucking walls with me and kept them. A guitar just came to life in there. It was a little downtrodden, but it had a great vibe, this energy to it."

The group's pathway through the music business began with Sydney publisher Ted Albert, who lived in a mansion called Boomerang and sailed with his

JOSH CHEUSE

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father on a yacht of the same name. His company, Albert Productions, had signed Australian rock'n'roll band The Easybeats in 1965, putting out classics such as “Friday on My Mind” and “St. Louis” before it broke up four years later. That act's rhythm guitarist, George Young, turned out to have talented younger brothers, Malcolm and Angus, and the Albert connection led to AC/DC signing with the company in 1974. George and bandmate Harry Vanda, who served as *High Voltage*'s co-producers, had a knack for drawing the screechy rock rawness out of Angus and Malcolm.

“That was our first real album,” Angus told *Guitar Player* in 2003, “and it was the one that defined our style.”

The album's opening track, “It's a Long Way to the Top (If You Wanna Rock 'n' Roll),” began as a “jam,” Angus recalled in a 1992 interview, published many years later in *Classic Rock*. “We were just playing away, and my brother George left the tape rolling. After we finished, he was jumping up and down in the studio going, ‘Great, great, this is magic!’ And you're thinking, ‘What's he on about?’ And he played it back and there it was. It had that magic atmosphere.”

Although AC/DC became known for its lascivious vocals full of not-so-disguised euphemisms, “It's a Long Way to the Top” is almost a folk ballad, lamenting endless hard work and “getting old, getting gray, getting ripped off, underpaid.” Country, folk and Americana singers including Lucinda Williams and Cody Jinks have covered it.

The droning track required a droning instrument — bagpipes — as its crucial final touch, the producers' idea.

“*Bagpipes!*” exclaimed Steve Leeds, head of album promotion for AC/DC's longtime U.S. label, Atlantic Records, as reported in Jesse Fink's 2013 book *The Youngs: The Brothers Who Built AC/DC*. “There are no bagpipes on the radio, even today. George and Harry were fucking geniuses. They figured it out. Conventional wisdom says, ‘You guys are crazy.’ ”

George knew how to communicate with musicians, and he recognized that the band's imperfect quality in the studio could lead to spontaneous excitement on its recordings. At one point, while recording the title track, drummer Phil Rudd thought he had “messed up” during a fill, Angus recalled in 1992. “And George is signaling: ‘Keep going. Keep going.’ And we finish that take and we come in and go, ‘OK, we better try again.’ And he goes, ‘No. That was the take.’ And that was the one we used.” The track wound up closing the album.

From Australia to the United States, where it was released in 1976, *High Voltage* received almost no attention — other than negative attention. Critics were merciless. *Rolling Stone*'s infamous pan called the band “Australian gross-out champions,” declared hard rock “has unquestionably hit its all-time low,” referred to its rhythm section as “goose-stepping” and concluded the whole operation added up to “calculated stupidity.” A short feature two years later — written by Ira Kaplan, later frontman of Yo La Tengo — concluded, “There's nothing new going on musically, but AC/DC attacks the old clichés with overwhelming exuberance.”

Top, from left: AC/DC's Malcolm Young, Bon Scott and Angus Young onstage in 1976. Bottom, from left: The band's Phil Rudd, Angus, Mark Evans, Malcolm and Scott in 1977.

Many critics back then blooped over Malcolm's steel-beam rhythms and Angus' devotional reinterpretations of Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry and stripped-down arrangements that distilled The Rolling Stones, Aerosmith and The Stooges into riffs that gained power with repetition.

“At that time, *Rolling Stone* was really into the punk genre and were matching up everything to what was the current flavor of the day,” Angus told *Vulture* in 2020. “What we did was rock'n'roll and we weren't going to change anything.”

The vision paid off — eventually. Angus would criticize “really soft” Australian radio for being overobsessed with Air Supply and worse. But in the United States, programmers for a small San Antonio rock station picked up *High Voltage* and aired it immediately. This led to a show at Austin's 1,500-capacity Armadillo World Headquarters and, later, airplay in the Bay Area and Boston.

“Up until that point, all we had really done was a lot of touring around Australia, so it was great to get into a studio and really hear how we sounded,” Angus recalled in 2003. “What was impressive about that album was that it sold on word-of-mouth alone.”

The band also played at CBGB, the New York punk fixture where the Ramones, Patti Smith, Blondie and Talking Heads first became famous. When Atlantic co-founder Ahmet Ertegun saw that gig, he agreed to sign AC/DC, steering the band at first to the label's Atco imprint. “I'm not sure I would have signed them when I first heard them,” the late Ertegun told *Billboard* in 1998. “They were very modern; they were pushing the envelope. They were very young-looking then and very ratty-looking. A lot of those bands had disdain for anything that resembled authority.”

Angus responded, sort of. In a 2020 interview with *Billboard*, he said, “Some people would say, ‘Well, you have a very juvenile approach to what you're singing.’ But good rock'n'roll is juvenile, in a sense.”

At first, *High Voltage* was hardly a blockbuster, neither in its native Australia nor the United States. Not even “T.N.T.” charted on the Billboard Hot 100. But it since has become one of the band's most beloved tracks, with 436 million U.S. streams, as well as 826 million Spotify plays internationally.

AC/DC's first track to hit the Hot 100 was “Highway to Hell,” in October 1979, at a modest No. 47. And its debut album didn't crack the Billboard 200 until 1981, long after *Highway to Hell* broke into the top 20 and *Back in Black* followed by reaching No. 4. Album-oriented rock, indeed. *High Voltage* took five years to go gold in the United States in 1981, according to the RIAA, and hit quadruple-platinum in July 2024.

As it turns out, consistency is exactly half of AC/DC's formula for commercial success. The other half is a combination of songs that sound perfect no matter how many times they're played on the radio and onstage. Like the song goes, “If you think it's easy doing one-night stands/Try playing in a rock-roll band.”

James Hetfield of Metallica put it a different way, describing the live Angus experience to *Billboard* in 2016: “That guy sweats so much every night. I can't believe his head is still on his body.” b

ONSTAGE: DICK BARNATT/REDFERNS. PORTRAIT: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES.

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Pierre (left) and Henry Beasley of Balu Brigada photographed March 19 in New York.

BALU BRIGADA

The alt-pop sibling duo is burning up with breakout radio hit "So Cold"

BY ANDREW UNTERBERGER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ASHLEY MARKLE

When Pierre and Henry Beasley of alt-pop duo Balu Brigada relocated to New York in 2023, they didn't expect to sound like Big Apple bands from 20 years earlier. But as the brothers — originally from Auckland, New Zealand — began to record in Harlem, the music was different from back home. "You can hear [how the] aggression and tension and grit comes out in New York," says Henry, 31.

One such song has taken Balu Brigada from a cult act seeking major-label footing stateside — the brothers signed to Warner Music Australasia and Atlantic Records simultaneously in 2022 — to chart-topping hit-makers. In March, "So Cold," a spiky, slinky single released in June 2024, reached No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Alternative Airplay chart — a ranking more often dominated by legacy acts. But slotting in so easily at radio hardly happened by accident: Pierre and Henry (both multi-instrumentalists who share singing duties) were inspired by The Strokes and Franz Ferdinand while creating the song. "[We were watching videos of] those guys playing big festivals and having these big guitar riffs that people chant," recalls Pierre, 27. "We leaned into that."

The duo posted an Instagram Reel of "So Cold" in spring 2024, with a red-jumpsuit-clad Pierre playing bass while sitting in his Auckland bedroom. The clip took off on social media and attracted immediate industry buzz. "We got so many calls," says Goldie Management's Amy Goldsmith, who has been with Balu Brigada since seeing the act play at a New Zealand barbecue in the late 2010s. "[Recording Academy CEO] Harvey Mason Jr. even rang and was like, 'What is this band? I'm so excited about them.' "

The clip also got the attention of Chris Woltman — longtime manager of alt-pop superstars Twenty One Pilots — who proceeded to dig into the band's catalog: "They'd been writing these amazing tracks," Woltman recalls. "It raised this question: 'How can this band not be getting noticed?' " He signed the pair to his and Pilots frontman Tyler Joseph's ARRO label and added Balu Brigada to the Pilots' *Clancy* tour. (ARRO has an artist venture with Atlantic for Balu Brigada, but Woltman says the label is otherwise independent.)

Balu Brigada played in arenas worldwide in front of more than 1 million total Pilots fans. In the meantime, "So Cold" started catching on at streaming services, helped by a music video and a September synch in soccer video game *EA Sports FC 25*. (It has 12.7 million official on-demand U.S. streams through April 10, according to Luminate.) Woltman and the team then started pushing the track to alternative radio; on March 29, after performing on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* earlier in the month, "So Cold" topped Alternative Airplay in its 24th week on the chart.

Pierre and Henry are now finishing their debut album, expected later this year, which includes "emotional sensitive jams" and "obnoxious pseudo-EDM stompers," Henry says. Balu Brigada will also embark on its own U.S. headlining tour. Woltman sees the success as validation of a long-term strategy that reaches beyond the duo's still-growing breakout hit. "None of this is about an overnight moment," he says. "It's not about a song, a TikTok moment, an influencer moment. It's about the everything else." b

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